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THE VISUALIZERS:
A REASSESSMENT OF TELEVISION'S NEWS PIONEERS

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THE VISUALIZERS:
A REASSESSMENT OF TELEVISION'S NEWS PIONEERS

by

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to the late Richard D. Yoakam:

mentor and inspiration for both of my careers.

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The roots of today's television newscast can be traced back to a small group of people at CBS-TV in New York in the 1940s. But because of the power of radio and the dismissive attitude of the radio journalists at the time, the birth and early development of television news has been mostly ignored.

When Edward R. Murrow and other radio correspondents came back from World War II, they avoided or ridiculed the new medium. Therefore, the task of creating a television newscast fell to a disparate group of people, including a photo caption editor, a network messenger boy, a foreign-language translator, a Broadway sound engineer, a still photographer, and a newsreel cameraman.

Instead of mimicking other media, the CBS-TV crew developed a new template for news. In the 1940s, these people were developing processes, negotiating technology, making content decisions, and structuring a newscast format which would be in place when millions of Americans turned down their radios and switched on their new video receivers.

This project focuses on the beginning and development of news at CBS-TV in New York from 1941 through 1948. Through oral history interviews, combined with research into personal archives, government records, company documents, newspapers, and trade publications, a more complete picture of this important era of journalism emerges.

Before Pearl Harbor, CBS-TV devoted more time to news in the afternoon/early evening hours than it does to this day. In the 1940s, television news was not dominated by an anchor. Instead, CBS spent years experimenting with the role of the commentator on television and considered the newscaster just one of many important newscast elements.

Their arguments and experiments concerning non-visual news, the importance of the newscaster, story selection and length, and television's strength and weaknesses are still being debated to this day.

Because of limited technology, The CBS-TV news people considered stories for news value, not on the availability of film. As a result, visualization techniques such as maps, animated graphics, artwork, interviews, and film became integral parts of the newscasts. As a whole, the various methods of visualizing the stories laid the foundation for the television newscasts we watch today. For those efforts, 1940s CBS-TV news people are television news' first "visualizers."

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In June of 1944, CBS News reached new heights in popularity and importance for the American people. Edward R. Murrow had already put together an impressive collection of reporters to cover World War II. During the first half of the year, he added even more correspondents to the group known as "The Murrow Boys." So when the Allies hit the shores at Normandy, listeners could rely upon the names and voices they had already grown to trust. Richard C. Hottelet flew with the Air Force on a bombing raid that day and returned to England with one of the first radio eyewitness accounts of the troops storming ashore. Charles Collingwood, Larry LeSueur, Bill Downs and others followed with reports from their unique vantage points during the landing and early push across France. Murrow himself orchestrated the coverage and provided his unique perspective from London.[1] In less than a decade, radio news had emerged as one of the most important sources for news. During the D-Day coverage, the number of people listening to the radio increased by 138 percent for one two-hour period.[2]

At the same time the Murrow Boys were sending back dramatic accounts of the war from Europe, other news people were also working on D-Day coverage for CBS in a newsroom and studio located above the Grand Central Terminal in Manhattan. But these people were working in an almost-unknown part of the broadcasting network: television.

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[1]CBS D-Day coverage from Stanley Cloud and Lynne Olson, *The Murrow Boys: Pioneers on the Front Lines of Broadcast* Journalism (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996) 201-209; A.M. Sperber, *Murrow: His Life and Times* (New York: Freundlich Books, 1986) 239-242; Alexander Kendrick, *Prime Time: The Life of Edward R. Murrow* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969) 243-244, 263-270; CBS News, *D-Day: The Twentieth Century* (New York, Franklin Watts Inc., 1967) 1-61.

[2]Audience levels from "Big D-Day Hooper," *Variety,* 14 June 1944, 22; and Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc., *1944 Annual Report*, 20, CBS News Reference Library, (CBS-RL).

A handful of CBS employees had been putting together a weekly video newscast for less than a month when the D-Day invasion was launched. The crew wouldn't even air a newscast on D-Day, since CBS television only broadcast on Thursday and Friday nights, and the invasion happened on a Tuesday.

Obviously, the work of the CBS Radio news team had a much bigger impact on the country in 1944 than any early television broadcast. Radio news had become one of the most important sources for war news. At the same time, CBS's television signal only reached parts of the New York City area and disappeared silently into the ether except for the few thousand receivers that had been purchased before the war. But in fewer than ten years after D-Day, Murrow's medium of choice—radio, had been eclipsed in audience size by television; and within two decades, television had replaced the newspaper as the most popular medium for news.

Because of the power of radio, the long shadow of Murrow and his "Boys," and the small audience, this early era of television news, roughly from 1941 to 1948, has been mostly ignored or trivialized. While these news people wrestled with primitive technology and a tiny audience, their struggles, compromises, choices, and innovations laid the foundation for the television newscasts we watch today. The more we know about the people who pioneered news on the new medium and realize their opportunities and constraints during the early years, the more we will understand the evolution of one of the most important information sources in our society.

Creating a single grand narrative of early television news, or television itself for that matter, would be a daunting task and probably a deceiving story. Early television stations each developed separately with different objectives and goals. Plus, each community had its own unique experience with the first flickering images representing that area. The first commercial coaxial cable linking together a handful of stations and

allowing for true "network" television wasn't completed until 1948. Before that moment, each station was a true "local" media source. That coaxial cable didn't link the east and west coast stations until 1951. Therefore, the beginning of television news isn't one story, but a series of different experiences depending on the station and the geographic location.

This project focuses on CBS instead of other early television stations for a few main reasons. First of all, by the time commercial television began in 1941, Columbia had already established a strong reputation for news coverage on radio because of the work of Murrow, William L. Shirer and others in Europe before the United States entered the war.

Plus, CBS had been one of the earliest pioneers in television broadcasting, along with RCA, NBC, Westinghouse, General Electric, and Don Lee. Unlike news efforts at the other stations, CBS television employees made a concerted effort to create a new format for journalism on television, dating as far back as the 1941 newscasts. By contrast, NBC allowed advertisers to determine format and content of various television news efforts during these years, which resulted in short-lived programs which had little connection to each other and NBC.

The visualization efforts and techniques at CBS television news in the 1940s became the standard for most television newscasts in the years and decades that followed. These years of experimentation at CBS involved determining the role of the newscaster on television, the potential ways to visualize stories without access to news film, and even the overall part television should play in the journalistic landscape; all issues still being debated to this day.

CBS is also an important choice for this project because the efforts of the early television news pioneers have been mostly ignored and buried under the power and reach

of CBS radio news during this era. Most of the famous names in CBS radio news wanted no part of television in the 1940s and histories written about this era reflect their views about the medium.

While the on-air people might have been dismissive of the new medium, the owner of the company, William Paley, sensed the potential of the video signal. CBS had been pumping millions of dollars into developing television since the early 1930s with the idea that the investment would eventually result in a sizable audience and advertising dollars.

During this same period, the Federal Communications Commission exerted real pressure on the broadcasters to provide more than just entertainment programming in exchange for that radio license. That pressure transferred over to television which is one reason why news and public affairs programming has been part of the television schedule from the beginning.

While the audience may have been small, the television efforts took on added significance because of the CBS news reputation. Plus, since the station was located in New York City, the small audience included writers from some of the biggest and most influential newspapers in the country. Media critics such as Jack Gould of the *New York Times* and John Crosby of the *New York Herald Tribune* wrote about the early news efforts and their columns carried weight.

Since the famous radio journalists at CBS shunned television and the network felt obligated to provide news on the new medium, the important task of creating a format for news on television fell to a small group of enthusiastic men and women from a variety of backgrounds. They were former photo caption editors, network messenger boys, foreign-language translators, eager college students, Broadway sound engineers, still photographers, newsreel cameramen, newspaper reporters and radio news writers.

Some of these people quit or were fired before most Americans had ever even seen a television set. They went on to successful careers as Hollywood movie directors, public relations experts, computer programmers, and proponents of using mass media for world education. Others stayed with television news and had successful careers as correspondents, producers, and managers. One is still working at CBS more than a half-century later, just recently eased from the top position at the most successful television news program in the medium's short history.

No matter their later careers and influence, for a relatively short period of time during and after World War II, these people came together to create the television newscast. Since they are responsible for the beginnings of what has become our most popular source of news, their era in television news deserves another look, or maybe its first serious look.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Radio and television will forever be linked by their common delivery system--broadcasting. Even though the two media employ dramatically different formats, their transmission method of sending a signal through the air for capture by individual receivers is the same.

With that common bond, television will always be an afterthought when compared to the audio medium in the 1940s. Radio was king. Concerning news, the comparisons aren't even close when judged by importance and impact.

Murrow himself played a significant role in this back-of-the-hand treatment of television. He didn't like the format for news and didn't mind letting his views be known. His views not only influenced his own staff, but countless other broadcasters and journalists in this country. In addition, most broadcast news pioneers who have written

about their experiences had limited involvement in television in the formative years of 1941-1948.

As a result, little has been written about this period in television news. This omission is significant because during this very era when radio was proving its journalistic power, the people over in television news were developing processes, negotiating technology, making content decisions, and structuring a newscast format which would be in place when millions of Americans turned down their radios and switched on their new video receivers.

Broadcast Histories

Murrow might have been one of the first broadcast journalists to dismiss early television news, but other writers have continued that approach. Broadcasting pioneers are responsible for many of the books that attempt to chronicle the early years. Edward Bliss, Reuven Frank, Sig Mickelson, and Fred Friendly published their views about the importance of television news, but for the most part, they weren't involved in the 1940s-era newscasts. So they tend to follow the Murrow lead or use significant events to signal the beginning or end of an era.

Edward Bliss' *Now the News* is considered one of the most exhaustive looks at broadcast journalism in this country. Bliss started working at CBS News in World War II. But he spent most of his career on the radio side before finally switching to television in 1963 when the newscasts expanded to thirty minutes.[3] Concerning early television news, he uses a popular approach of comparing the political conventions of 1948 and 1952. Using a circus theme, Bliss says that television "poked its nose under the tent" in

[3]Gary Paul Gates, *Air Time: The Inside Story of CBS News* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978; Berkley, 1979) 203.

'48 and "performed boldly in center ring" four years later.[4] He called the Douglas Edwards 1948 newscast a "prototype" of today's network news and admitted that most correspondents regarded it as a "pesky stepchild."[5]

Sig Mickelson dismisses all television before the 1952 convention as "a novelty in the home."[6] Mickelson started his broadcast career in radio in Minnesota and joined CBS television as a manager in 1950. In his writing, Mickelson also tends to wrap television news around the two conventions, referring to the 1948 event as "real birth of TV news,"[7] and "television's coming out party"[8] even though only a "handful of Americans" [9] had ever seen a television screen at that point. But Murrow's influence sneaks through as Mickelson explains that "news broadcasts went from obscurity in the late 1940s, a novelty shunned even by radio news personnel, to a dominant role in electing a president in 1952."[10]

Reuven Frank's two convention descriptions for television news are "novelty" for 1948 and "most important medium of coverage" in 1952. In between, the medium "stumbled along" as it "moved toward becoming a universal American presence."[11] Frank started at NBC-TV as a news writer in 1950 and eventually worked his way to the president of the network. He has a very good grasp of the strength and limitations of television news in the early 1950s and backs up his descriptions with his experiences.

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[4]Edward Bliss Jr., *Now the News: The Story of Broadcast Journalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) 252.

[5] Bliss, 222.

[6] Jay Perkins, "Television Covers the 1952 Political Convention in Chicago: An Oral History Interview with Sig Mickelson," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 18, no. 1 (March 1998): 95-110.

[7] Sig Mickelson, *The Decade That Shaped Television News: CBS in the 1950s* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993) 10.

[8] Ibid., 13.

[9] Ibid., 11.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Reuven Frank, *Out of Thin Air: The Brief Wonderful Life of Network News* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991) 28.

But he starts his history by saying that television news "began" with the 1948 conventions.[12] To this day, Frank insists that television news programming prior to 1948 "didn't matter." He points to the opening of the first commercial coaxial cable line for intercity broadcasting in May 1948 as the birth of network television news.[13]

Fred Friendly was an important force in broadcast news for a half-century. Yet he claims that "electronic journalism" didn't begin until 1953 when Murrow's *See It Now* first focused on McCarthyism and the red scare. Friendly, along with Murrow, created *See It Now* and that program was their first serious attempt at journalism on television.[14]

One broadcast pioneer who did experience part of 1940s television news and is still mostly dismissive of the era is Don Hewitt. Hewitt directed the CBS-TV newscast from 1948 until the mid-1960s. He also directed *See It Now* and later created *60 Minutes*. Hewitt, who never seems to be without a colorful comment, went so far as to say that the only two things worth watching on television in 1948 were "Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theatre* and the occasional Joe Louis heavyweight fight."[15]

The man who wrote the most comprehensive look at broadcasting in this country is also partly responsible for the dividing lines of television news. Columbia University professor Erik Barnouw wrote a three-volume history of radio and TV. *A Tower In Babel* came out in 1966, *The Golden Web* in 1968, and finally, *The Image Empire* in 1970. Each book covers a set of years in the 20th century. He chose to begin the final volume, which mostly focuses on television, in 1953. One of the obvious reasons is the FCC freeze on license applications. From 1948 until 1952, the government stopped issuing

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[12] Ibid., 7.

[13] Reuven Frank, interview by author, 18 June 2003, Tenafly, NJ, telephone tape recording. (RF-OH1)

[14] Fred W. Friendly, *Due to Circumstances Beyond Our Control…* (New York: Random House, 1967) 3.

[15] Don Hewitt, *Tell Me A Story: Fifty Years and 60 Minutes in Television* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001) 43.

new station licenses while it tried to rework the rules for television airwaves. So the 108 stations that were either on the air or approved for construction in 1948 didn't have to worry about any new competition for three-and-a-half years. But that license freeze also meant the television experience was dramatically different in cities across the country. While people in Austin, Little Rock, and Denver didn't even have one station during this period, viewers in New York and Los Angeles had a choice of seven different stations.[16]

By starting a new volume with a specific year, Barnouw leaves the impression 1953 signals when television really becomes important. In fact he calls the 1948-1952 years a "laboratory period" for television.[17] In 1970's *The Image Empire,* he refers to television news in 1953 as "an unpromising child. It was the schizophrenic offspring of the theater newsreel and the radio newscast, and was confused as to its role and future course." Curiously, he did tone down his criticism of early television news in a later edition. When he revised his television history as *Tube of Plenty,* the 1990 edition reduced the same description to "an unpromising phenomenon."[18]

In the past few decades, scholars have begun to go beyond the original dismissive frame to bring out a more complete look of at least some aspects of early television news. Crotts wrote about television coverage of the 1948 conventions while Karnick researched the evolution of NBC-TV news from 1945 to 1953. Anzur studied one of the first live television news dramas with the coverage of a little girl trapped in a well near Los Angeles in 1949. Allen's profile of WPIX provides a good case for that station's role in developing the format for local television news. Loggins digs out evidence of stations

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[16] Erik Barnouw, *Tube Of Plenty: The Evolution of American Television,* 2d ed., rev. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) 112-114; Erik Barnouw, *The Golden Web: A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Volume II-1933 to 1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966; reprint, Bridgewater, NJ: Replica Books, 2000) 285; Mickelson, *CBS News in the 1950s,* 6, 25-26.

[17] Barnouw, *Tube Of Plenty,* 113.

[18] Erik Barnouw, *The Image Empire: A History of Broadcasting in the United States from 1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970) 40; Barnouw, *Tube Of Plenty,* 168.

that were investing in local news and providing and important service for their viewers during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Murray and Godfrey's *Television In America* pulls together different television station histories from around the country.[19]

The common thread of reasoning behind the omission of these formative years of television is the lack of an audience. Even as the war ended and people had the money to spend on a new appliance, manufacturers had to switch over from wartime production and couldn't turn out the sets fast enough for demand. So throughout the mid-to late-1940s, television may have been increasing its audience, but the medium was easily ignored in the long shadow of radio.

But Gomery insists that dismissing television for its audience size during this period is a mistake. He points out that while only 190,000 sets were in use in 1947, that number jumped to a million by the next year and up to seven million by 1950. Even more important, Gomery argues that the American television audience was established by the late 1940s. Previous research had dismissed the 1940s television audience as small and not representative of the population, consisting mostly of people in bars, people with a lot of money, and people willing to gamble on risky technology. Instead, Gomery describes the 1949 television family as living mostly in the cities or suburbs, neither very rich nor very poor, relatively well educated, young, with two or three children.

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[19] Gail Crotts, "A Spectacular Coup: Television and the 1948 Conventions," *Journalism History* 1, no. 3 (Autumn 1974): 90-93; Kristine Brunovska Karnick, "NBC and the Innovation of Television News, 1945-1953," *Journalism History* 15, no. 1 (1988); 26-34; Terry Anzur, "Everyone's Child: The Kathy Fiscus story as a defining event in local television news," paper presented at annual meeting of Association of Educators in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, D.C., August 2001; Craig M. Allen, *News is People: The Rise of Local TV News and the Fall of News from New York* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 2001), 3-20; Ginger Loggins, "The Hidden History of Television News, 1948-1953," paper presented at annual meeting of the Broadcast Education Association, Las Vegas, NV, April 2004; Michael D. Murray and Donald G. Godfrey, eds., *Television in America: Local Station History From Across the Nation* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1997), 3-396.

According to Gomery, "that audience would change only marginally as the 1950s unfolded."[20]

In any case, audience size isn't the principal purpose for this study. The people who crafted the early newscasts, struggled with the technology, and experimented with formats, had to fill the time, no matter how many, or few, people were watching.

Negotiating Technology in 20th Century Media

Technology infiltrates all discussions of television news, both now and by the people who were working with the medium as a news source in the beginning. Instead of limiting the discussion of potential stories to the news value of the topic, television news people can't today and couldn't in the formative years escape the handcuffs of technological limitations and the possibilities of untried formats. If they wanted visuals for the story, they had to wrestle with lighting, story proximity, audio, film processing time and film editing. If the story couldn't be covered with a camera, then they turned to still photos, animations, maps, or other artwork. Therefore, technology played a major role in the development of television news but little has been written about adapting journalism for a new format.

Carolyn Marvin does provide insight into the negotiation of the new technology for presenting news on television. Her book, *When Old Technologies Were New,* focuses on the turn of the last century and the beginnings of mass media. Marvin warns against the convenient and pervasive habit of historians to place the social origin of mass media in the period when media producers convince people to start buying the appliances. Marvin says that arbitrary designation ignores the important period before the public got involved, as inventors and practitioners negotiated the power and control of the new

[20] Douglas Gomery, "Finding TV's Pioneering Audiences," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2001): 121-129.

media. She argues against signifying the start of mass media as when people started buying radios and televisions in mass quantities. Instead, she shows how the social history of the technology began in the late 19th century when people were talking about the potential of emerging technology. She says the early years of a medium is "when patterns anchored in older media that have provided the stable currency of social exchange are reexamined, challenged, and defended."[21]

Her study of the early years of the "electric media" provide a guide for understanding how early television journalists made decisions on content and form. "New practices do not so much flow directly from technologies that inspire them as they are improvised out of old practices that no longer work in new settings."[22]

While the movie industry in the 20th Century quickly settled on an entertainment model for bringing in the most viewers, news did play a role in that format for more than half the century. Before television, people often witnessed their first moving image of a famous person or place through the short news segments that ran between the feature length movies.

Fielding chronicles the advent and demise of the theater newsreel in *The American Newsreel, 1911-1967*. He lists three reasons why the newsreels started to decline as early as the late 1930s: many of the stories were scheduled events carefully choreographed by all of the companies, the content became similar since the newsreel companies were cooperating more than competing, and the unionization of the newsreel cameramen which tended to highlight the commonality of the cameramen and discouraged scoops that would reflect badly on the others. Fielding argues that the

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[21] Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 4.

[22] Ibid., 4-5.

Hollywood studios doomed newsreels almost from the beginning because they didn't want the news clips to be controversial or upsetting to the audience.[23]

These studies provide insight into technology that would be important to early television news. But the technology was only part of the story. People had to interact with that technology and negotiate the best methods for presenting news on television on a consistent basis. Researchers have spent considerable time in network television newsrooms studying journalistic practices, but their studies all came well after the formative years and tend to ignore the very technology itself.

News People and Process

Network television newsrooms became popular places for academic research in the 1960s. Maybe it was the impact of the John F. Kennedy assassination coverage and the major role television played as the nation mourned. Maybe it was the 1963 Roper public opinion poll which signaled the first time that television topped newspapers as the most popular source for news in this country.

For whatever reasons, sociologists during this period started to seriously look at the news medium and ask questions about the process and content. The data for four of the most important books on television journalistic methods and content were collected in the mid-to-late 1960s and early 1970s. Edward Jay Epstein's *News From Nowhere*, Gaye Tuchman's *Making News*, Todd Gitlin's *The Whole World Is Watching* and Herbert Gans' *Deciding What's News*, were all written after observing news people during this period.

All four authors studied the process of reporting news as well as the structure of the news that is created. For Epstein, the first key was to stop thinking of journalism as a

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[23] Raymond Fielding, *The American Newsreel, 1911-1967* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 270-287.

group of highly independent newsmen often known as "the press." Instead, he studied the process as a business organization. Even though news events happen at different times and different places around the world, by looking at news as a business he found "certain consistent directions in detecting, covering, and reformulating events over long-term periods are clearly related to organizational needs."[24]

For Epstein, the individual journalists aren't important. They fit into an organizational process. A reporter has to answer to an editor who is dependent on the news executive. So at each step in the process, there are procedures to keep individuals from having too much control. Plus, the budgetary constraints play a big role in how news is presented. He found that 90 percent of the news for one network came from crews in the five cities where the network had bureaus. Plus, the need to keep costs down pushed journalists to look for news that could be anticipated in advance so equipment would be in place.

Tuchman was looking into newspapers and television news at roughly the same time. Unlike Epstein, she feels that journalism is a profession, but that those professionals work for an organization. She noticed many of the same constraints the organization puts on the news gathering process. For Tuchman, the key is that the news presented wasn't a mirror of society but instead is a social construction of reality.

Tuchman is given credit for her observations on the framing involved in news stories. She argues those frames are a result of the professionals working within an organization. The professionals believe they are amassing verifiable facts but the deadlines and organizations demand a quick process. So reporters create what she calls a "web of facticity," which is a collection of supposed facts that taken together verify each

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[24] Edward Jay Epstein, *News from Nowhere: Television and the News* (New York: Random House, 1973; Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), xviii.

other. If a fact can't be verified, it is hung on a source, known as attribution. Through this process, reporters claim they aren't making value judgments, yet the stories often hinge on the government official as the keeper of the facts. As a result, "the activities of the American news professionals are geared to maintaining the American political system as much as the work of Soviet journalists is geared to preserving that nation's political system."[25]

Gitlin comes to much the same conclusion concerning the coverage of the anti-war movement of the 1960s. He found that when the media determined a hook for its coverage, the movement had little to say about that hook. Unlike the previous authors, Gitlin didn't watch the process from inside the news organizations. Instead, his research began as a member of the Students for a Democratic Society movement. He became fascinated with how the news media covered his organization.

For Gitlin, the coverage of the anti-war movement is a good example of hegemony at work. The news media reflect the established order through not only the selection of stories, but how those stories are framed. Gitlin looks to news sources as a major reason for hegemony. Since reporters rely on government and police sources for so much of their news, their stories reflect the interests of those sources.[26]

While Gitlin was helping organize anti-war protests, Gans was spending time at CBS, NBC as well as *Time* and *Newsweek* watching how those stories were being put together for the audience. Gans gives a lot of the power over news content to the sources. Because of the organizational structure and strict deadlines, reporters rely on a small, reliable list of sources. Those sources have the power to give or withhold information.

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[25] Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 99.

[26] Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 253-282.

Plus, since most reporters are general assignment and not specialists, those sources have a better chance of influencing the content. On the other hand, the beat reporters are often in a "symbiotic relationship" with their sources so they are more likely to cover stories that won't hurt that relationship. Plus, those beat reporters in Washington are usually the most influential journalists in the organization. During the Vietnam War, reporters covering the war were telling their editors the positive information from the Johnson administration didn't fit the scene they were covering. But since the senior reporters were covering the White House and the Pentagon, the news media continued to give more weight to the Washington angle.

Gans also believes the reporters were reflecting the dominant culture in America "mainly because they express, and often subscribe to the economic, political, and social ideas and values which are dominant in America."[27]

All four of these authors offer important insights into television news practices and coverage issues. But at the same time, these works—as well as other studies of television news—tend to separate or ignore the importance of the technology, especially the role of the visuals. Barnhurst and Nerone argue the wall between the text and the visuals is built in the classroom, extends to the journalism workplace, and continues in academia:

> The theories and methods at hand, as well as the scholarly societies and journals reflect the industrial divide between word and image work. The resulting studies of journalism pay scant attention to visual devices, and visual communication usually brackets the text.[28]

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[27] Herbert J. Gans, *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979; New York: Vintage Books, 1980), xv.

[28] Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone, *The Form of News: A History* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2001), 10.

Technology does play a major role in historical works on the evolution of journalism in this country. Many historians use technology to explain advancements and changes in news coverage and consumption across the centuries.

Technology's Role in Changing News Media

Up until the last half-century, one of the most common frameworks for explaining the development of newspapers in this country involved technology. Using this framework, major changes happened in American newspapers as a direct result of the invention or improvement of some part of the process of publishing a paper.

Frank Luther Mott wrote one of the most influential works on newspaper history in the middle of the 20th Century. *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States* was considered a seminal work on newspapers in this country. Mott used the technology frame throughout the book to signify shifts in newspapers. Faster printing presses and cheap paper allowed the penny press era to develop and flourish in the mid-1800s. Timeliness became an important part of news coverage because "of the three 'miracles' of nineteenth century communication—the steamship, the railroad, and the magnetic telegraph."[29] Another important shift using the technology argument involved the increase in use of illustrations and later, photographs. Those changes in newspaper design happened because of the invention of faster engraving processes, including halftone photo-engraving.[30]

The important role of technology in the evolution of newspapers over the centuries is obvious and undeniable. But in the past few decades, scholars have backed away from the idea that technology was responsible for the changes. Michael Schudson explains the rise of the penny press as more of a response to the "democratization" of the

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[29]Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the United States Through 260 Years: 1690 To 1950,* rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), 244.

[30]Ibid., 501.

country in the 1820s and 1830s. Schudson argues that the rise of a "democratic market society" brought about a population that was interested in government news and felt part of the political process.[31]

Form of News

Kevin Barnhurst and John Nerone, in their book *The Form of News,* have done the most exhaustive study of newspaper design and content over the centuries. They note the importance of technology but agree with Schudson that technology wasn't the reason for changes in newspaper presentation. "Instead it acted as a tertiary force, providing the props and backdrops for broad sociocultural factors like politics and economics and for the design sense of printers and publishers."[32]

Even though the authors focus on newspapers, their study of layout and design, typography, use of illustrations and photographs, and styles of reporting provides some insight into the structure of early television newscasts.

Barnhurst and Nerone describe the two main eras of newspapers in the late 19th Century and throughout the 20th Century as Victorian and Modern. The Victorian paper of the turn of the last century was jammed with stories like a "crowded potpourri."[33] The stories filled the pages in a haphazard manner forcing the reader to pick and choose the important topics. They compared a Victorian paper to a department store: lots of choices for the user with little guidance from the publisher on the order or importance.

The Modernist phase of newspapers started with the 20th Century and gradually became the standard. The Modernist paper brought order out of the chaos of Victorian papers. The number of stories on the front page dropped from close to 25 in 1885 to just

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[31]Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 57-60.

[32]Barnhurst and Nerone, 111.

[33]Ibid., 5.

over five in 1985. The headline changed from being an index of topics within the story to an overall guide to the content below. The department store metaphor gave way to the social map. Newspapers were now taking on the role of agenda-setters, offering to help the readers make sense of the world. "From the churning and abundant mass that Victorian newspapers displayed, the modern style distilled and ordered view of the social world, one serving a similar list of political commercial activities but meant to excite the enthusiasm of citizens and consumers."[34]

Photographs became a more important part of the newspaper as the century advanced. True, technological advances had made it much easier to take pictures at news events and get them in the paper quickly. But the authors argue the reason for the increased use of photographs stemmed from the modernist approach. The photographs represented reality and "became understood as the zenith in a long drive toward true fidelity, toward the capture of the real, unmediated by human artistry."[35] Illustrations, which had been an important part of a newspaper, fell into disfavor because they were no longer considered "real."

Barnhurst and Nerone say the modernist phase of newspaper design happened in response to the rise of modernism in American society, especially in the arts. At the same time, journalists started to assert themselves as professionals, with a special expertise in finding and presenting the important news. As professionals, they felt the need to put more emphasis on "digesting and organizing the news for the readers."[36] Even though the newspaper became easier to read and had a clearer hierarchy of news, the authors argue that the modernist approach wasn't simply a case of designers having more power than journalists:

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[34]Ibid., 188.
[35]Ibid., 137.
[36]Ibid., 217.

> In fact, the modern front page was also a reporter's front page, but for a different kind of reporter. The modern reporter--the professional journalist—was an expert. The expert explained the news where the old reporter retold it. The virtues of the professional journalist, expertise and discernment, found the timeless moral or the historical significance behind a rush of events. The virtues of the old reporter came from showing that rush and revealing its urgency, compelling in and of itself.[37]

Barnhurst and Nerone may have been writing about newspaper journalists in the above section, but their descriptions and observations help us to also understand the early television journalists. Many of the television news pioneers came out of a newspaper or print background. So the modernist approach to finding and presenting the news on paper has strong similarities to the work of early television journalists.

Overall, Marvin's *When Old Technologies Were New,* and Barnhurst and Nerone's *The Form of News* provide the strongest insights into the people, process and news product in the early era of television news. Marvin emphasizes the importance of the negotiation of the technology well before an audience has been found. Barnhurst and Nerone's modernist era of newspapers and the journalists provide a framework for understanding the backgrounds and journalistic beliefs of the people who were responsible for television's first regularly scheduled newscasts.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Early television news is truly ephemeral. The newscasts left the CBS tower on the Chrysler building and disappeared forever. The videotape recorder hadn't yet been invented. Engineers could make a crude copy of a television program by pointing a film camera at a picture tube. But these kinescopes weren't cheap and weren't used for archival purposes. In fact, Reuven Frank of NBC News says kinescopes of *Camel News*

[37]Ibid., 251-252.

Caravan broadcasts exist today only because Winston-Salem, North Carolina didn't have a television station at the time. So the NBC News crew had to make a recording of a newscast each week to let the cigarette sponsors see what they were buying.

In the absence of the actual broadcasts at CBS, another good source would be scripts and story rundowns of those newscasts. While a sampling of that material can be found in various archives, those printed materials don't alone do the medium justice. Television isn't just words on a page. A rundown or script can show written content, but gives little hint into the overall impact of the words mixed with pictures and sound.

Oral History Interviews

One important resource concerning this early period of television news is still available, although not forever. Several of the very people who worked in the early CBS-TV newsrooms are still with us. These people provide a unique insight into the struggles and challenges of presenting news on television. They remember the influences of newspapers, magazines, radio and even the newsreels on the development of television news.

Fourteen people involved with CBS Television and Radio news during the period 1941-1954 have been interviewed for this research project: Howard Back, Robert Bendick, Chester Burger, Henry Cassirer, John Hammerslough, Don Hewitt, Richard C. Hottelet, Larry Racies, Philip Scheffler, Robert Skedgell, Joe Wershba, Shirley Wershba, Av Westin, and Gordon Yoder. These people represent different eras in the timeline of this project. In addition, longtime NBC newsman Reuven Frank was also interviewed for his unique perspective on both the competition between CBS and NBC during those years and his views on the importance and negotiation of visuals in early television news. In-depth oral history interviews were conducted with each person on at least two different occasions. Each person was interviewed once in person with the use of a digital video

camera. The other interviews were conducted by telephone and through e-mail correspondence.

Conducting oral history interviews is one of the most effective ways to get beyond the available news content and dig into the process of presenting news on television. Startt and Sloan call it "the historical recovery of the remembered but unrecorded past."[38] Studying content reveals *what* was presented as news, but interviewing the workers moves towards the *how* and *why* of the early development of television news.

Coincidentally, one of the first extensive oral history projects involved broadcasting. In the early 1950s, Allan Nevins of Columbia University interviewed radio pioneers who were part of a group called the "Twenty-Year Club." Twentieth century technology also presented one of the strongest reasons for the emergence of oral history interviews as a legitimate historical research method. Historians realized the widespread diffusion of the telephone caused people to talk more and write less. Therefore, ever-widening gaps in traditional written historical records made it increasingly difficult to re-create events and processes.[39]

Oral history also gained favor in the 1960s as social history became a more popular way to look at the past. Instead of limiting history only to the political and military leaders, historians started looking at how the rest of society lived in different times. The leaders may have left behind a bountiful paper trail, but the rest of the people live mostly anonymous lives. The historian, armed with a tape recorder and note pad, could record the recollections of people and groups who would otherwise disappear in the

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[38] James D. Startt and Wm. David Sloan, *Historical Methods in Mass Communication*, Communication Textbook Series, ed. Jennings Bryant. (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989), 130.

[39] Louis Starr, "Oral History," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Nashville, TN: Oral History Association, 1984) 4-9.

future. According to Thompson, "(r)eality is complex and many-sided; and it is a primary merit of oral history that to a much greater extent than most sources it allows the original multiplicity of standpoints to be recreated."[40]

Broadcast news pioneers certainly can't be considered forgotten voices. But the oral history aspect of this project allows for the multiplicity of voices that has been missing from previous histories. Don Hewitt, Reuven Frank, Av Westin and others have had the opportunity to disseminate their versions of early television news through autobiographies. This project adds in the photographers, such as Larry Racies and Gordon Yoder, the assignment editors, including Chester Burger and Howard Back, among others. Adding all those perspectives together provides a more textured understanding of the people and the process of early television news. Plus, the oral history interview allows the researcher to go beyond the autobiographies of the published pioneers and delve into areas untouched in their own writing.

Oral history has its limitations. Barbara Tuchman worries that just interviewing people on tape isn't necessarily scholarship and the ease of the method is drowning us in information as "all sorts of people being invited merely to open their mouths, and ramble effortlessly and endlessly into a tape recorder, prodded daily by an acolyte of Oral History, a few veins of gold and vast mass of trash are being preserved which would otherwise have gone to dust."[41] Oral history interviews have the most relevance when the interviewer has a specific project in mind before turning on the tape recorder. The chosen topic forces the historian to research the existing literature and other primary sources to prepare for the interview. In addition, a specific project provides for a better

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[40]Paul Thompson, "History and the Community," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 40.

[41]Barbara Tuchman, "Distinguishing the Significant from the Insignificant," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology,* 76.

chance that the interview will be used for scholarship as opposed to the encounter merely being added to a collection of similar interviews that may or may not be studied in the future.

Sitton, Mehaffy and Davis warn the historian to treat the oral history interviews with the same skepticism of all raw data, "history as primary sources with the warts, wrinkles, and inconsistencies still in place."[42] With this project, the participants were asked to remember events from more than fifty years ago. Plus, these people are all in their seventies, eighties, or nineties. The vagaries of long term memory must be taken into account when assessing the validity of the information. For Moss, the problems of recollection include "intervening events in the experience of the witness/narrator, or his prior receptivity to certain ideas and not to others, may induce him to diminish the importance of some evidence and perhaps to enhance beyond proper proportion the importance of other evidence."[43]

As with all historical data, the best way to judge the value of the information is through internal and external criticism. Was this person a witness to the event he or she is describing? Would this person have been in a position to make such an observation? If the internal validity appears strong, the next step is subject that information to external criticism. How does this observation fit with other historical data? Can the observation be corroborated by another source? For this project, the interviews can be compared against, in some cases, the person's own archival records, as well as government documents, newspaper articles, magazine and trade paper accounts, company records, published and unpublished autobiographies and other historical documents. Qualitative

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[42]Thad Sitton, George L. Mehaffy, and O.L. Davis, Jr., *Oral History: A Guide for Teachers (and Others)* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983) 4.

[43]William Moss, "Oral History: An Appreciation," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 91.

researchers often call this method of external criticism triangulation. In triangulation, a researcher uses multiple sources or methods for what Lindlof calls "a comparative assessment of more than one form of evidence about an object of inquiry."[44]

Other Sources

In addition to the oral history interviews, the original written records were consulted in the archives of some of the same subjects who were interviewed. Also, the CBS News Reference Library in New York provided invaluable material including press releases, internal memos and annual reports. That information helped build the overall framework of CBS' efforts in radio and television news as well as validate or contradict information provided in the interviews. For an even broader context, the Federal Communications Commission files at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland revealed important information about CBS' relationship with the government agency. The annual license renewal paperwork provided an opportunity for the network to highlight its efforts in news and other public affairs programming to justify its ownership of the broadcast license. The FCC files also provided a broader overview of the major issues in early television which could have had an effect on the development and emphasis on television programming, including news.

Trade publications such as the *Radio-TV Annual, Broadcasting, Billboard,* and *Variety* offered information on the development and growth of the industry. Since the network was based in New York City, newspapers from that city were used for audience perspective and program reviews.

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[44]Internal and external criticism from Startt and Sloan, 117-121. Triangulation from Thomas R. Lindlof, *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*, Current Communication: An Advanced Text Series, Vol. 3 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995) 238-239.

Several of the broadcast news pioneers, including some of the people involved in the oral history interviews, have written autobiographies of their role in early television news. Plus, several secondary sources were utilized for added perspective.

The purpose of this project is to combine the new oral history interviews with other existing historical data to bring to light a forgotten, but important, era in the formation and development of television news in this country.

Chapter 2

Mystical Thing in the Sky:

Television's Back Story

Bob Skedgell didn't know what to expect when he was called into the office of legendary CBS News Director Paul White in the spring of 1941. But he knew what he wanted. Even at the young age of 21, Skedgell had already spent close to two years at CBS as a copy boy and as a page. Famous war correspondent H.V. Kaltenborn had even barked "sharpen them, you hear me boy?!" when Skedgell reached for the commentator's dull pencils as part of his menial duties.

Now he wanted to be a writer. He wanted to be one of the privileged few who took lifeless wire copy and transformed it into conversational news stories. If he were a writer, his words would be delivered to the nation by such famous names as Kaltenborn, Elmer Davis and Robert Trout.

Skedgell didn't expect the promotion to just fall in his lap. He knew he needed to improve his writing to rise to the level of the CBS News staff. So in the mornings, he'd buy a paper and bring it back to his small apartment on 29th Street on the east side of Manhattan. He'd take each story from the first few pages of the newspaper, one by one, and wrestle the long, fact-filled sentences into a more readable broadcast style. He'd pull page after page of rewritten newspaper stories out of his typewriter until he could fill a mythical five- or ten-minute radio newscast. When he went into work, he'd bring in those pages of news copy and show them to a CBS news writer or editor. Those people would

mark up his copy and he'd use those markings as a guide to improve his writing the next day.

One person could provide Skedgell with that important break: Paul White. The CBS Director of News Broadcasts commanded quite a presence in the CBS newsroom. By this time, White had already put Edward R. Murrow on the air in Europe and allowed Murrow to round up an impressive team of war correspondents. At the same time, White pulled together a news staff in New York to handle the national news and coordinate the coverage from Europe. Before White, radio news consisted mostly of commentators mixing facts and opinions and announcers reading news directly from the news wire services.

White had a gruff, tough-guy exterior but those who worked with him saw a great leader and someone who knew how to bring out the best in his people. His office had big glass windows so the staff could peer in while he talked with Murrow in London or Bill Shirer in Berlin.

Skedgell knew all of this history when he stepped into White's office. But the copy boy only processed the one word he heard come out of White's mouth: "writer." "Bob, how would you like to be a writer…?" He definitely heard that much. Even after leaving the office, his colleagues congratulated Skedgell on his promotion to writer.

But White had been more specific about the promotion. This writing job would be one of the first of its kind. Twenty-one-year-old Bob Skedgell had been tapped to write the news for a new format: television. "When he said 'writer in television,' remembers Skedgell, "I heard 'writer,' television was a mystical thing in the sky. I had an idea what it was, but didn't really know."

The young newsman can be forgiven for his limited awareness of the new medium. Not many people had watched television, even though experiments had been

going on in New York and in other cities around the world for more than a decade. Many New Yorkers, like Skedgell, knew something about the live pictures in a box because of the 1939 World's Fair in New York. RCA made a big splash by offering live television programming in its building at the Fair. President Franklin Roosevelt even came up from Washington to talk into the camera for the opening. Skedgell had read about the RCA demonstration, but he never got out to the fair to see the new toy. Instead, in 1939, he was fighting to find a job and then learning the ropes as a new employee at CBS. So when Paul White picked CBS's newest news writer to handle television newscasts, Bob Skedgell had never even seen a television set. And he wouldn't until he first visited CBS's television studios that spring in 1941.[45]

EARLY TELEVISION EXPERIMENTS

"Television is not just around the corner," warned Edwin King Cohan in April 1930. The Director of Technical Operations for the Columbia Broadcasting System wanted radio listeners to know that his broadcasting company wasn't missing out on a golden opportunity to add pictures to its growing radio network:

> We are continually on the lookout for any indication that the major difficulties of television have been overcome, and we are continually investigating and witnessing all kinds of demonstrations, no matter how far-fetched they seem to be; but the technical problems involved are so numerous and so complex that engineers specializing in the subject agree that only through patient laboratory work, conducted in the finest equipped laboratories available and by the highest type of scientific intelligence, will television pass from its present laboratory stage to the living-room of the American people.[46]

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[45] Robert Skedgell , interview by author, 16 August 2003, Jamaica Estates, NY, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. (RS-OH2)

[46] Edwin K. Cohan, "In Anticipation of Television," *What's On The Air,* April 1930, 5; CBS Television 1941-6/51, (CBS-RL)

Cohan needed to keep a watchful eye on television. Columbia would be a natural for the new medium since the radio network was quickly becoming one of the most important entertainment and information sources in the country. Plus, television had been getting a lot of attention in the 1920s because of various inventions and breakthroughs in technology.

A working television system dates back to the nineteenth century. In Germany in 1884, Paul Nipkow was experimenting with a perforated rotating disc. He filled the disc with holes in a spiral pattern. Light would bounce off the subject and through the holes and recreate the image. The image would change as often as the disc could spin, creating motion. By the 1920s, various inventors were working with improved versions of the mechanical disc television system. The BBC put a lot of money and effort into a television service in England. Around 1925 in New York, Charles Jenkins began television programming and offered his own "radiovisor" sets to the public for about $100. During this same period, inventors were already looking beyond the crude spinning disc and started experimenting with an electronic television system. Philo Farnsworth, Ernst Alexanderson, Vladimir Zworykin, Lee De Forest and others continued to provide the different pieces needed to make television more than an experimental toy for science enthusiasts.[47]

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[47] Information on Nipkow disc and early TV systems from "Chronological Development of Television Broadcast Service;" Allocation Hearing: Committee Television Broadcast 2 of 2; adj-channel interfere-allocation hear; Records Relating to the History of the Development of Television, 1938-65; Broadcast Bureau: Broadcast Facilities Division, Technical and Allocations Branch; Records of the Federal Communications Commission, Record Group 173; National Archives at College Park, MD, (FCC-HD); David E. Fisher and Marshall Jon Fisher, *Tube: The Invention of Television* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1996; San Diego: A Harvest Book, 1997), 16-20; Daniel Stashower, *The Boy Genius and the Mogul: The Untold Story of Television* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), 58-68; James Von Schilling, *The Magic Window: American Television, 1939-1953* (New York: The Haworth Press, 2003), 2-8; Erik Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel, A History of Broadcasting in the United States, Volume 1-to 1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 210-211, 231-232; Michael Ritchie, *Please Stand By: A Prehistory of Television* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1994), 17-31; Richard W. Hubbell, *4000 Years of Television: The Story of Seeing at a Distance* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1942), 65-84; Orrin E. Dunlap Jr., *The Outlook for Television* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1932), 10-90.

RADIO EXPERIMENTS WITH TELEVISION

While Columbia may have seemed a natural for television, the company wasn't in the best position to capitalize on a new medium in April 1930. After all, only 19 months had passed since William S. Paley had taken over the failing small radio network. Paley got involved in the network after watching the sales of his family's cigar business jump after he sponsored a radio program. The new network president had to keep increasing the number of affiliates and improve the programming just to try and compete with the giant NBC radio networks and their parent companies.

The National Broadcasting Company hit the air with a splashy four-hour broadcast in November 1926. NBC was the brainchild of David Sarnoff of the Radio Corporation of America. He wanted a company to bring together radio stations around the country in one network. Sarnoff's RCA already sold most of the radio sets in America. Those sets were made by General Electric and Westinghouse and sold under the RCA moniker. He convinced RCA, GE, and Westinghouse to put up the money for the radio network. NBC was an immediate success. The only national radio service affiliated with so many stations so quickly that it split into two different services, the Blue and the Red networks.

NBC and its parent companies became a vertical radio empire before most people had realized the potential power of the medium. The NBC radio networks provided the programs, the NBC affiliate radio stations provided the audience by broadcasting those programs around the country, and the advertisers provided the money because they could now spread the word of their products all across the nation. Plus, the corporation completed control of the process by making sure most people listened to radio programs on receivers manufactured by Westinghouse or General Electric and distributed by RCA.

Even when competitors had a reasonable percentage of the radio receiver market, they still had to use an RCA radio tube. Sarnoff used the important tube to try and force retailers into only selling RCA tubes in receivers manufactured by his companies. He was looking for a virtual monopoly in radio set sales. In addition, the NBC companies also supplied much of the equipment needed to transmit radio broadcasts through the airwaves.[48]

With the radio model of dominance working so well, Sarnoff looked to create the same marketplace advantage for television. So he pushed the engineers and inventors at RCA, Westinghouse, and GE to solve the "major difficulties" which CBS's Cohan thought would delay television. Drawing on his experience with the radio tube, Sarnoff knew if his companies could invent, buy, or otherwise own the important parts needed for television, he could control the manufacturing of not only the transmitting equipment, but also the television receivers which Sarnoff envisioned would eventually sit in everyone's home, alongside his radio set.

Paley didn't have such grandiose plans for CBS and television at that time. CBS couldn't control the receiver market because the company didn't have a manufacturing component. Columbia had no plans to build radio receivers, let alone TV sets. The CBS engineers were investigating the potential of television, but mostly as outsiders keeping an eye on the inventors doing work elsewhere. Plus, after the stock market crash in October 1929, research money became tighter, especially for a medium that wouldn't be bringing in revenue for the foreseeable future. During the late 1920s and early 1930s,

[48] Formation of NBC and tubes, radio receiver information from Barnouw, *Tower in Babel,* 48-50, 114-118, 185-191; Sally Bedell Smith, *In All His Glory: The Life of William S. Paley, The Legendary Tycoon and His Brilliant Circle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 54-56.

CBS put most of its efforts into building up its radio network of affiliates and improving the programming going to those stations.

But CBS did have one big reason to watch closely the development of television. In 1929, Paramount Pictures provided five million dollars in stock in exchange for 49 percent ownership in Columbia. The maneuver allowed Paley to survive some serious money problems at the time. Paramount made the move because of the potential of television. Just two years before the arrangement, *The Jazz Singer* successfully merged sound with pictures in Hollywood and Paramount had seen how talking pictures were changing the movie business.[49]

CBS ADVANCES "AROUND THE CORNER"

The "patient laboratory work" that Columbia's Edwin King Cohan said would be needed to improve television apparently only took about 15 months. On July 21, 1931, the Columbia Broadcasting System invited dignitaries and reporters to witness its first television broadcast. The 45-minute broadcast began with New York Mayor James J. Walker pulling back the curtain to reveal CBS's new "radio-vision studio" in its headquarters at 485 Madison Avenue. To mark the importance of the occasion, the mayor was followed by Natalie Towers, described as the "Columbia Television Girl." Announcer Ted Husing let the viewers know that the tables had turned, "You know, as I think of it, I've been talking to you radio listeners over a period of years now, and you haven't been able to talk back to me. Now your day has come-with television, like this, you can look at me, and I can't possibly see you."[50]

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[49]In 1932, CBS bought back its stock from Paramount to regain more control of company, Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel,* 251.

[50] "History of WCBS-TV," TVB Stations NY. WCBS-TV (WCBW), (CBS-RL).

Whether or not the organizers of that first broadcast gave much thought to the future of the medium, in less than an hour, they packed in many programming elements which would later become an important part of later television. On the musical side, George Gershwin played "Liza" at the piano, The Boswell Sisters performed "Heebie-Jeebie Blues", and Kate Smith sang "When the Moon Comes over the Mountain." Henry Burbig did his "Little Red Riding Hood" comedy routine while Helen Gilligan and Milton Watson combined music and comedy with "Now You're In My Arms." Filling the public affairs portion of the program, Dr Walter Schaffer was brought in from Germany to talk about television in that country. With a nod to self-promotion, CBS Technical Director Cohan dropped his gloomy forecast for the medium from 1930 and instead let the people know what they could expect of CBS television in this new era.

The guests might have been content to watch the proceedings live from the radio-vision studio. But since the event marked the beginning of television for Columbia, the audience was moved over to another studio equipped with a bank of television screens, each one about four-inches square. Certainly not as exciting as seeing the performers live, but the separate studio provided a television viewing experience. Plus, the broadcast really didn't combine pictures with sound in one signal. Instead, the audio portion of the program boomed across the country on the Columbia radio network, originating from WABC, Columbia's flagship radio station in New York. The picture came courtesy of W2XAB, CBS's new experimental TV station. Starting the following day, Columbia would use its short-wave station in New York, W2XE, to provide the audio for New York viewers.

After the gala premiere, Columbia settled into a routine of providing combined audio and video programming between 8:00 PM and 11:00 PM. During the afternoon,

W2XAB would transmit a silent picture so the engineers could see how the signal would be affected by the subways, elevators, street cars and electrical signs in the city.[51]

One important element was missing from the first Columbia television broadcast--news. In the first place, a newscast probably wouldn't have fit with the music and comedy filling most of the program. At the same time, news had just started to find its niche on the radio broadcast schedule in 1931. Radio had already proven its worth for special news events such as elections, speeches, and disasters. But the format for presenting news on the radio on a regular basis hadn't yet been perfected. Floyd Gibbons started what might be considered the first network news broadcast in 1929 on NBC. CBS countered with Lowell Thomas the next year when Gibbons couldn't come to an agreement with his sponsor. In a strange agreement, Thomas broadcast for NBC on the east coast and CBS on the west coast. NBC had Thomas to itself by 1931. CBS had also hired Paul White by then, but his early responsibilities for Columbia's radio network involved more publicity than public affairs.[52]

Columbia's experimental television station didn't ignore public affairs after that first night. During the first year, Programming Director William Schudt, Jr. presented a recurring program called *Bill Schudt's Going to Press*. Schudt would interview correspondents, editors and columnists about current events on the broadcast which was simulcast both on television and radio.

The television crew also brought to their viewers the news of Franklin Roosevelt's victory over Herbert Hoover in the 1932 Presidential election. Ken Ellis read the election returns during the evening, using charts to show the voting trends. W2XAB

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[51] Description of first CBS broadcast from "Inaugural of Television Broadcasting" Guest Program and "History of WCBS-TV", TVB Stations N.Y. WCBS-TV History (WCBW), (CBS-RL); "Television Studio Opened by Walker," *New York Times*, 22 July 1931, p. 23; Ritchie, 22-23.

[52] Gibbons and Thomas information from William S. Paley, foreword to *History as You Heard It,* by Lowell Thomas (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1957), vii-x; Bliss, 25-28.

also brought in newspaper artists Milt Gross, Albert Frueh and Lou Hanlon to help visualize the event. The men drew comic strips live on the air as well as caricatures of the leading political figures. For Hanlon, a staff artist for the *New York Mirror,* the election night work wasn't his first on television. He had already been drawing live on W2XAB for a weekly program on the station.[53]

One year, 2,100 broadcast hours, and 3,000 programs after the premiere, W2XAB celebrated its first anniversary with another television special. For this broadcast, the Harold Stern Dance Orchestra performed from the rooftop garden of the St. Moritz Hotel in Manhattan. But Stern himself directed the orchestra from nine blocks away, at the television studio. The musicians followed the baton by watching receivers set up at the hotel. Unlike the previous year, the pictures and sound now traveled together from the transmitter to the few receivers located around New York City. On that anniversary night, July 31, 1932, Schudt told the viewers about the next few months at W2XAB where hundreds of artists and performers would be "working for the sake of television; working so that you may have perfected television in your homes within a short time."[54]

If seven months is considered a short time, something important did happen within that time frame. But it wasn't "perfected television." On February 23, 1933, CBS shut down its television station "temporarily." Temporarily lasted more than eight years.

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[53]election night coverage from Benn Hall, "Television," *The Billboard,* 12 & 19 November 1932, pp. 15; other W2XAB information from William S. Paley, *As It Happened:A Memoir* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1979), 399; Bliss, 219; "History of WCBS-TV," 3, (CBS-RL).

[54] "W2XAB Back On The Air," *New York Sun,* 23 July 1932, CBS Television 1941-6/51, and "History of WCBS-TV," 3-4, both (CBS-RL).

PROBLEMS BEHIND THE CAMERA

CBS succeeded in generating publicity for its television experiments through the inaugural broadcast, the anniversary program, and the thousands of hours of programming during the 19 month run. But for all of its efforts to create the illusion of pioneering efforts in television, Columbia was falling behind its competitors as it tried to convince the public the company was leading the way.

Even when CBS brought in the mayor for the first broadcast in 1931, W2XAB's television transmitter joined five others already broadcasting in the New York City area alone. Companies such as NBC, RCA, Bell Telephone Laboratories, Jenkins, Westinghouse, Philco, and General Electric either already had experimental television stations on the air or were working on improvements to existing technology. Close to three years before CBS even signed on the air, General Electric's WGY in Schenectady presented *The Queen's Messenger,* the first television drama.[55] On the west coast, Don Lee put a lot of money and ingenuity into his station in Los Angeles. Over in London, the BBC had joined with Baird Television to provide video broadcasting as early as 1929.

The main problem of early television, including Columbia's experimental effort, was purely mechanical. The system to capture an image, transmit it through the air and receive the picture in another location was outdated even by the time CBS first raised the curtain on television.[56]

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[55]Russell B. Porter, "Play is Broadcast By Voice and Acting in Radio-Television," *New York Times,* 12 September 1928, 1; Ritchie, 21.

[56]Even though CBS didn't have the strong engineering department of some of the other pioneering television companies, the network did more than the others on presenting actual programming. During W2XAB's time on the air, it was the only New York station offering consistent programming. Most other experimental stations offered only films or test patterns, Benn Hall, "Television," *The Billboard,* various columns including 29 October 1932, 15, 5 November 32, 15, 12 November 1932, 10 December 32, 15.

Inventor Charles Jenkins caused much of the early excitement about television in New York City. He took the mechanical wheel system invented by Nipkow back in the 1880s, modified it, and even put together the receivers which could capture what he called "radio vision." The resulting fuzzy image could only scan 48 lines per screen, compared to the 525 lines which became the standard for the last half of the 20th century. But Jenkins created enough of a stir that he was able to convince Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover to appear on a radio vision broadcast in April 1927.[57] Since Columbia didn't have a manufacturing division working on television at this time, the company adopted the Jenkins system for its experimental station in 1931. Engineers had at least improved the system from 48 to 60 scan lines.

VISION OF ELECTRONIC TV

But even while Jenkins and others successfully used the mechanical system for crude television pictures, others already knew the "flying spot" method, as it was called, wouldn't survive. Even 14-year-old farm boy Philo Farnsworth knew there had to be a better way. When he was walking behind the horses pulling a mower on his family's farm in Idaho in 1921, he had a vision. He looked at the field which he had turned into alternating rows of newly cut hay. As he looked at the lines of hay stretching out before him, Philo Farnsworth saw the future of television. He had been reading some old scientific magazines at the time and he had been thinking about the visual medium. Farnsworth looked at his hay field and saw the horizontal lines of a television image. He imagined an electron beam scanning those lines at such a fast rate that the human eye would only see the one picture. Ten years before CBS's W2XAB, the mechanical

[57]Waldemar Kaempffert, "Television Knits the Nations Still Closer," *New York Times,* 17 April 1927, Sec. 10, 5; Ritchie, 17-19.

spinning disc system for television had already been replaced, at least in the mind of an Idaho teenager.[58]

All through the 1920s and 1930s, even while mechanical television systems gave video enthusiasts their first, fuzzy, grainy, washed-out vision of the new medium, the serious research pointed to an electronic television system. Researchers knew a metal wheel could never spin fast enough to provide an adequate picture.

As early as 1908, A.A. Campbell Swinton of Great Britain wrote about the potential of using cathode rays for both transmitting and receiving television signals. Swinton's theoretical argument helped spark Farnsworth's hay field vision. By 1927, Farnsworth demonstrated the first electronic system and removed all moving parts by the next year. Meanwhile, Vladimir Zworykin had taken his ideas and lab equipment from Westinghouse to RCA after convincing Sarnoff he could create an electronic system. First Zworykin came up with the kinescope, which was a cathode ray receiver. But Farnsworth still had the superior camera tube, which he called the "image dissector."

In 1930, Zworykin even visited Farnsworth's San Francisco lab, followed in the following year by Sarnoff himself. Three months before CBS hit the air with mechanical TV, David Sarnoff offered Philo Farnsworth $100,000 for his invention and services. Farnsworth turned down the offer. With that rejection, Farnsworth stood squarely between RCA and a monopoly on the equipment needed to provide electronic television.[59]

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[58]Early Farnsworth career from T.R. Carskadon, "Phil, the Inventor," *Colliers,* 3 October 1936, 19; Donald G. Godfrey and Alf Pratte, "Elma 'Pem' Gardner Farnsworth: The Pioneering of Television," *Journalism History* 20, no. 2 (Summer 1994), 74-79; Fisher & Fisher, 126-128; Dunlap, 12, 150-153; Stashower, 5-26; Ritchie, 9-14.

[59]Fisher & Fisher, 38-39, 210-213, 357-365; Carskadon, 19; Godfrey and Pratte, 74-79.

GOVERNMENT ROLE IN BROADCASTING

The method of presenting television wasn't the only interference causing a hazy view of the medium's future. The government didn't want television to become a commercial service until it was sure the public could invest in a television set and not have to replace it every time an improvement was made to the process. For broadcasting, the government meant the Federal Radio Commission, which became the Federal Communications Commission in 1934.

Congress created the FRC in 1927 after radio broadcasters complained about interference from competing stations. Radio station owners wanted the government to limit the number of stations across the country so they could be guaranteed a clear signal. Congress deemed the air waves a national resource and therefore couldn't be owned by radio stations. Instead, the companies would be allowed to use the public's airwaves in exchange for offering more than just entertainment programming. The FRC, and later the FCC, used the argument of limited public airwaves to justify its later involvement in everything from programming, advertising, to proper conduct over the air.

Following the radio model, the FRC forced television broadcasters to apply for an experimental license. Experimental is the key. Television would need years of experimentation of both the equipment and the programming before it would be ready for widespread acceptance. To keep the experimenters from pushing the issue, the FRC wouldn't allow any advertising on television. Advertising could lead to a commercial service before the best system had been developed. Even more important, the FRC didn't want the public to be convinced to buy early television receivers which weren't compatible with all current signals and future developments. So even though Charles Jenkins provided regular programming with his own mechanical system as early as 1929, the FRC didn't like the part of the broadcast in which Jenkins told people how to buy one

of his receivers. The government considered that information an advertisement and Jenkins had to stop promoting the one way he might have been able to make money on his service.[60]

During the depths of the great depression, companies with proven products and loyal customers had a hard time staying in business. Very few had the deep pockets necessary to continue broadcasting television programming with only the hopes of a payback sometime in the future. Jenkins ran out of money in February 1932 and his mechanical system and television patents ended up at RCA. Because of radio success and Sarnoff's firm belief in the future of television, RCA did have the money and was willing to spend it.

RCA continued its experimental station W2XBS in New York, using a mechanical 60-line system, similar to the CBS broadcasts. But with Zworykin and others pushing the boundaries, RCA also had other experimental stations working on 120-line systems and even UHF frequencies. The company had also already begun using Zworykin's kinescope receiver in those experimental broadcasts in 1932.[61]

CBS didn't have the unlimited funds or even the great engineering minds working on television. One year after Jenkins gave up, W2XAB, using the Jenkins mechanical disk system, went off the air as part of an overall budget cut at the network. CBS technical director King Cohan explained to the viewers "we now feel that further operation with the present facilities offers little possibility of contributions to the art of television."[62]

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[60]Fisher and Fisher, 97-101.

[61] "Outline of Experimental Work W2XBS New York, NY 1928-1939," Television 1944 Allocations 1 of 4; Television: Allocations; (FCC-HD).

[62]End of W2XAB from "Blow to Paid Sustainings With Falling of CBS Ax," *The Billboard,* 4 March 1933, 12; Benn Hall, "Television," *The Billboard,* 4 March 1933, 15; Benn Hall, "Television," *The Billboard,* 11 March 1933, 15;and "History of WCBS-TV," 4, (CBS-RL).

TELEVISION RETOOLS IN THE LAB

Cohan's words from 1930 proved prophetic; television wasn't right around the corner. That corner seemed to recede further in the distance as mechanical systems, one by one, left the air. Throughout the rest of the 1930s in the United States, the hallmarks of later television dramas—failure, bitter fighting, struggles, and success--happened mostly off camera, in the research laboratories and courtrooms.

After Farnsworth refused to sell out to RCA, he hooked up with Philco and provided a few years of experimental broadcasts with his electronic system. But Sarnoff made sure Farnsworth wouldn't succeed by pressuring Philco into dissolving the partnership. Philco needed RCA's tubes for its profitable radios, so the company sacrificed Farnsworth to keep Sarnoff off its back. Meanwhile, Farnsworth and RCA fought out the future in the courtroom as well. Both Farnsworth and Zworykin claimed to have the patent for the first electronic system.

The courtroom testimony included Farnsworth's high school teacher pulling out a weathered piece of notebook paper which supposedly had the inventor's original sketch for electronic television from back in 1921. The court fight wasn't just for bragging rights. If Zworykin prevailed, Sarnoff and RCA would control all the important patents for electronic television. The court ruled in Farnsworth's favor, since he had a working system as early as 1927.[63]

Farnsworth and his people spent as much time working on legal challenges as they did on improving their television system. RCA had always found a way in radio and television to either invent the necessary components or somehow get control of them. Up to this point, Sarnoff had never paid anyone or any company for use of a patent.

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[63]Carskadon, 19; Fisher and Fisher, 234-236.

In the lab in the 1930s, Zworykin and the RCA engineers made significant improvements to their camera tubes, first with the iconoscope, followed by the image iconoscope, and later the image orthicon. These tubes and cameras changed television dramatically. The earlier tubes required so much light that the people who appeared on camera started sweating almost immediately and more than one person wound up with burns through the clothing because of the heat intensity of the lights. The newer cameras allowed the engineers to dramatically reduce the amount of light in the studio and more importantly, the cameras could now pick up distinct pictures outdoors.

But RCA's dramatic improvements in the television camera came at a price. Zworykin couldn't produce the new tubes without the use of some of Farnsworth's patents. RCA tried again to take control of the necessary ingredients but Farnsworth wasn't selling. Finally in 1939, Sarnoff had to swallow his pride and the mighty Radio Corporation of America agreed to pay Philo Farnsworth royalties for his role as the father of electronic television.[64]

Television Experiments Not Only on East Coast

While the breakthroughs and court fights on the East Coast get most of the attention in this era of early television, pioneers in other parts of the country and around the world were also experimenting with television programming and the potential of news on the medium. John Cameron Swayze made his first television appearance in 1933. For about six months, he would climb to the roof of the tallest building in Kansas City and read the newspaper into a camera. People could make out his image on a receiver in the lobby of the building.[65]

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[64]Fisher and Fisher, 272-274, 287-289; Stashower, 180-186, 208-209.

[65]Barbara Matusow, *The Evening Stars: The Making of the Network News Anchor* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983), 60.

One of the most innovative stations during the 1930s doesn't get as much attention because of its location across the country from New York. Don Lee Broadcasting in Los Angeles tried a variety of formats on its experimental television station. Lee's director of television had good reason to believe in the potential of the medium. Harry Lubcke had worked with Farnsworth during the development of the first electronic system in the late 1920s. In 1931, while CBS struggled with its mechanical spinning disc operation, Lubcke put W6XAO on the air with one of the first electronic television systems. During the first year, the engineers transmitted a signal to a television receiver in an airplane flying over California. They also increased the power and frequency to such a level that people reported seeing the station as far away as Maine. On March 10, 1933, just a few weeks after CBS shut down its experimental station, W6XAO broadcast film of Los Angeles earthquake damage from earlier in the day. Lubcke called it the first television broadcast of scenes of a disaster. A month later, the station started running theater newsreels daily. By 1938, the station presented a nightly newscast called *World News*.[66]

Over in England, the BBC took television quite seriously during the 1930s. By 1936, the television service had switched from mechanical to electronic. Close to 200 people worked at the TV station, presenting hours of programming daily for almost three years. Even though the BBC was only interested in the programming and not in television set sales, people in Great Britain had purchased 23,000 receivers by 1936. The force strong enough to stop BBC television turned out to be war. On September 1, 1939, when Great Britain declared war on Germany, BBC television turned off the transmitter

[66] Steven C. Runyon, "The West Coast's First Television Station: KCBS, Los Angeles," in *Television in America,* ed. Murray and Godfrey, 301-321; Jeff Kisseloff, *The Box: An Oral History of Television, 1920-1961* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1995; New York: Penguin, 1997), 145-148.

in the middle of a cartoon. The BBC wouldn't get back into television for another seven years.[67]

RADIO NEWS

The beginning of World War II might have signaled the end of British experimental television, but the world wide crisis pushed radio into the forefront of news media and those people covering the war became the symbols and architects of what we now call broadcast journalism.

Edward R. Murrow with his radio introduction, "This ….is London," became one of the most recognizable symbols of the war. Starting with World War II, people didn't have to wait anymore for the morning and afternoon papers to get the latest news. They could not only hear Murrow talk about the attack on England, they could at the same time hear the bombs dropping on London—live, at the moment it happened. Americans wanted, and needed, the latest information possible during those years, especially after Pearl Harbor when the war became *our* men and women fighting and dying half a world away. The Second World War may have provided the opportunity for broadcast journalism to find its place in the news media landscape, but radio had been wrestling with its news role from the beginning.

Newspaper Publishers Try to Kill Radio News

Floyd Gibbons and Lowell Thomas started regular radio news broadcasts as early as 1929 and 1930. But until World War II, news on radio consisted mostly of popular commentators mixing news and opinion, live coverage of special events, and announcers reading wire service copy over the air. But even that limited news role proved to be too

[67]Richard Hubbell, *Television Programming & Production* (New York: Murray Hill Books, 1945), 183-203*;* Hubbell, *4000 Years,* 159-168; Ritchie, 73-78; Fisher and Fisher, 246-251.

much for newspaper publishers to handle. Newspapers wanted to keep news on the page and out of the air.

The battle line became the news wire services. As early as the 1920s, newspaper owners started to question why the Associated Press should provide news stories to radio stations. The most powerful wire service, AP, is a cooperative. The service is jointly owned by all of the subscribing news outlets. While the wire services do have their own reporters, much of the content comes from the member newspapers. Publishers saw their own service providing information to a competitor--radio, which would get the information to the public much quicker than the next edition of the newspaper. Plus, since most radio stations didn't have their own reporters in those days, those stations weren't contributing much material for the other members.

Press-Radio War

If newspaper owners had some concerns about the future of news on radio, those concerns became cries of protest after the 1932 Presidential Election. The very same night announcers on W2XAB read election news to the few people in New York with television sets, over on the radio side CBS and NBC had the results much faster than any newspaper extra. By the time the papers could print their election specials, people already knew Franklin Roosevelt had knocked Herbert Hoover out of the Oval Office. Most of the vote totals sent through the airwaves came from the various wires services.

By the following spring, The Associated Press board voted to stop supplying news to radio stations. United Press and International News Service later made the same decision. Also, the American Newspaper Publishers Association told its members not to print the local radio schedules unless stations paid for the space. Some newspapers did drop the listings.

Columbia News Service

Columbia handled the news embargo by setting up its own service. General Mills had the initial idea and put up half the money. Paul White designed the service utilizing freelance reporters around the country supplemented by Dow Jones financial news and a British news exchange. The *Columbia News Service* started in September 1933. White said even with the small operation, "it was surprising that the regular and long-established news agencies beat us so infrequently (on stories.)"[68] Some small newspaper even tried to drop their traditional wire service in favor of Columbia. The news competition caused publishers to keep up their pressure, now specifically targeting CBS for exclusion of radio listings in newspapers.

The *Columbia News Service* didn't even last six months but its potential brought newspaper publishers and the radio networks together to work out an agreement. The two sides decided on a separate news service called the Press-Radio Bureau. The radio networks kicked in the money and the news agencies provided the service. In return, CBS agreed to shut down the *Columbia News Service* in March 1934 when the Press-Radio Bureau came to life.

White called the agreement a peace treaty with no winners. The newspapers had been able to protect their turf by shackling the Press-Radio bureau with onerous restrictions. The service would only provide material for two five-minute newscasts a day. The early newscast could not be run before 9:30 a.m. to protect the morning newspapers and the later newscast had to wait until 9:00 p.m. so the evening newspaper wouldn't be scooped. In addition, the newscasts could not be sponsored.

As with many peace treaties, the participants couldn't stick to the agreement. The networks found ways around the sponsorship issues as well as the times of the newscasts.

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[68]Paul W. White, *News On The Air* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1947), 39.

By 1935, both UP and INS lifted the broadcast restriction and offered their services to radio stations. AP held out until 1941. The top people at CBS meanwhile could only speculate on what might have been if the *Columbia News Service* had continued. White called it a "glorious opportunity" while Paley himself questioned his decision in sacrificing the service. According to Paley, the *Columbia News Service* could have allowed CBS to gain "an earlier lead in developing its own news-gathering service." [69]

MURROW'S BOYS

By the time the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, CBS had already developed an important news gathering service, at least for covering the war in Europe. Edward R. Murrow deserves the credit as the architect for CBS's war coverage, but that's not why the network sent him over to Europe in the first place. When CBS hired Murrow in 1935, he wasn't a seasoned newsman like many of the people he later hired. He wasn't a newsman at all. CBS hired Murrow as its Director of Talks. He had been working for the previous few years organizing student conferences in the United States and abroad. He earned a degree in speech from Washington State College after a childhood in North Carolina and Washington.

As Director of Talks, Murrow would schedule politicians and other leaders to discuss issues or deliver speeches over the Columbia airwaves. He rarely appeared on the air himself. Two years later, in 1937, CBS sent him to London as its European Director of Talks. Even with the volatile conditions in Europe at that time, CBS still did not consider Murrow a reporter and he was not supposed to be reporting on world events. Instead, just as he had done in this country, Murrow arranged for others to speak on the

[69]"glorious opportunity" from White, 42; "an earlier lead…" from Paley, *As It Happened,* 136; press-radio war information from Barnouw, *The Golden Web,* 18-22; White, 30-49; Bliss, 39-44; Paley, *As It Happened,* 130-137; Smith, 164-166.

issues. If the situation called for insight into a news story, CBS expected Murrow to bring in a newspaper or wire service reporter to speak as an expert.

Columbia did allow Murrow to hire veteran newsman William Shirer to help arrange broadcasts from around Europe. Still, the two men were not supposed to be presenting the news. Instead, they were supposed to be chipping away at the dominant role NBC played in overseas information. The older radio network had established strong ties around Europe before Murrow arrived. NBC tried to position itself as *the* network for the United States, much like the BBC in Great Britain. The system worked so well that NBC had a monopoly on most coverage from Nazi Germany in the years leading up to the war.

Columbia's aversion to the responsibility of covering the dramatic situation in Europe reached its illogical conclusion as Hitler prepared to take over Austria in March 1938. Shirer had moved to Vienna from Berlin because of the strong belief Hitler would attempt a military coup. But just as the invasion seemed inevitable, CBS ordered Shirer to Yugoslavia to set up a concert by a boys' choir. At the same time, CBS sent Murrow to Warsaw for another broadcast that had nothing to do with the biggest story in the world.

The events of that month would not only change the map of Europe and set in motion a world war. The seriousness of the situation forced Columbia to recognize its role in getting the latest information to its listeners and as a result, the network created a broadcast which would become the standard format for radio and television newscasts up to this day.

THE BEGINNING OF MODERN BROADCAST NEWS

On March 11, 1938, Nazi troops stormed into Austria. Shirer raced back to Vienna. He planned to get the information out even if he had to go on the air himself. But the authorities wouldn't allow a broadcast over the now Nazi-controlled airwaves. Shirer flew to London where he could use the BBC facilities to get his eyewitness account to CBS. Murrow replaced Shirer in Vienna with the hope the ban would be lifted.

Back in New York, Paul White wanted reaction from various European countries in addition to the United States. They settled on a complicated format which had never before been tried on a news broadcast. With only eight hours notice on a Sunday afternoon during a military invasion, Murrow, Shirer and others had to set up a half-hour broadcast including reports from London, Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Rome and the United States. The tape recorder didn't exist in those days so all of the reports had to be live. They had to deal with make-shift transmitters, red tape from multiple governments, and several different time zones. With this primitive system, the broadcasters couldn't hear each other during the broadcast. Instead, they had to start their reports at an exact moment, hoping the last person had finished talking and even that New York could hear their transmission.

At eight o'clock on Sunday night, March 12, 1938, Robert Trout started the historic broadcast. Somehow, all of the live reports came in as scheduled. Shirer gave his impressions of the invasion. Murrow had the latest information from Vienna with speculation on when Herr Hitler might arrive in the Austrian capital. Politicians and other reporters provided news and perspective from the different cities. With that 30-minute broadcast, the news round-up had been created. Today's network television and

radio newscasts still follow this same general format: a newscaster in New York introducing reporters from different parts of the country and the world.

The success of the news round-up or "multiple pickup" broadcast allowed White to incorporate it into regular programming during the war. The format worked well later that year when Hitler challenged the rest of Europe to stop him from taking over Czechoslovakia. During the 18-day crisis, CBS provided numerous news round-ups on the situation with commentator H.V. Kaltenborn providing the analysis and perspective in New York. Kaltenborn rarely left he studio during what became known as the Munich Crisis. By the time British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced he had negotiated "peace in our time," Kaltenborn had become a celebrity in the United States for his marathon broadcasts. He quickly became one of the most popular commentators on U.S. airwaves and followed the coverage with a best-selling book and lecture tours.[70]

BUILDING THE TEAM

Murrow and Shirer knew there wouldn't be "peace in our time," but instead, war. They also knew they couldn't handle the coverage by themselves. With permission from New York, they started to build the staff that became the elite broadcast news team of the era. Murrow had consistent success hiring people away from United Press. UP paid notoriously low wages, so the wire service became a great apprenticeship for reporters. Eric Sevareid, Larry LeSueur, Charles Collingwood, Bill Downs and Howard K. Smith all took the leap from UP to CBS when Murrow made the offer. The only UP reporter who turned Murrow down during the war was Walter Cronkite. Cronkite was set to join

[70]World News Roundup information from CBS News, *CBS News 20th Century Roundup-The Murrow Boys*, Mike Freedman, Executive Producer, compact disc recording, 1999; White, 45-46; Sperber, 114-156; early Murrow and war coverage from H.V. Kaltenborn, *Fifty Fabulous Years: A Personal Review* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1950), 207-211; Cloud and Olson, 10-55; Bliss, 76-90; Kendrick, 130-142.

CBS, but his boss at UP gave him a big raise and begged him to stay. Cronkite didn't join CBS until the Korean War. Richard C. Hottelet also had experience with UP, but he had been working with the Office of War Information at the time CBS hired him in 1944.

Other reporters who worked for CBS in Europe during the war included Thomas Grandin, Mary Marvin Breckinridge, Cecil Brown, Gene Ryder, Bill Shadel, Douglas Edwards, Betty Wason and Winston Burdette.[71]

Murrow's Boys provided Bill Paley what he had wanted for his network since taking over Columbia in the 1928: respect and recognition. Don Hewitt, who would later be known as the man who created *60 Minutes,* worked as a reporter for *Stars and Stripes* during the war. He says that Murrow and his team weren't just the best broadcast journalists covering World War II, but the best reporters in any medium in the world. [72]

RCA SIGNALS THE "BIRTH" OF TELEVISION

> It (television) is an art which shines like a torch in a troubled world. It is a creative force which we must learn to utilize for the benefit of all mankind.
>
> -David Sarnoff , RCA President, April 20, 1939.[73]

While Adolph Hitler bullied his way across Europe during the late 1930s and early 1940s, David Sarnoff and RCA battled competitors and the government in this country in an attempt to dominate the emerging television industry--from the equipment needed to broadcast the signals, the programming to fill the hours, down to the very receivers people would be buying to witness the new medium.

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[71]expansion of CBS war coverage staff from *CBS 1944 Annual Report,* 20-21, (CBS-RL); Bliss, 91-97; Sperber, 167-261.

[72]Don Hewitt, interview with author, 13 August 2003, New York City, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (DH-OH2).

[73]"Dedication of RCA Seen On Television," *New York Times*, 21 April 1939, 16.

RCA's engineers had made major improvements to the electronic television system during the previous few years. Plus, Sarnoff agreed to pay patent royalties for the first time in the company's history, adding in the missing pieces provided by Philo Farnsworth and his television system. Overall, RCA had the technology, the power, and the money to start pushing for commercial television now.

But a powerful force stood between RCA and commercial television: the Federal Communications Commission. In the previous decade, RCA had been able to cement its dominance in radio while the government struggled with its role in the new broadcasting industry. But as television experienced high expectations and technical failures in the 1930s, the government kept watch.

The mood of the country had also changed dramatically in those ten years. In the mid-1920s, the economy kept growing and business leaders had vast power. But the stock market crash and depression changed that perception. Franklin Roosevelt pushed Herbert Hoover out of office in 1932 by promising a "new deal" of government help to revive the economy. Roosevelt surrounded himself with other "new dealers" who felt the government needed to represent the people against the potential of damaging greed from the nation's businesses. Roosevelt pushed the FCC to look into the cross ownership of newspapers and radio stations because of the potential of a monopoly of information.

Monopoly is a term being used at this time also as a warning of the power of RCA and NBC in broadcasting. CBS had made great strides in radio during the decade and other networks had started to provide additional competition. But NBC's two networks, Red and Blue, still had the dominant position in American radio. Just like the early years of network radio, RCA and NBC were so far ahead of other companies in laying the groundwork for television that critics warned the corporation could own the medium before the best system had even been developed.

Sarnoff knew if he could get people talking about television, he might be able to spur sales of RCA receivers. What he needed was a location which would guarantee large crowds. It just so happened that the perfect event would be happening right in the New York City area starting in 1939. Sarnoff decided to make a splash with television at the 1939 World's Fair in New York. He told his NBC executives to have television programs ready to broadcast and his RCA engineers to have television sets ready to sell. Never mind that the FCC hadn't yet approved broadcast standards or even picked a date for the start of commercial television.

TELEVISION'S FAIR

During the winter and early spring of 1939, construction crews put up a unique building on the fairgrounds in Flushing, Queens. The RCA Pavilion Building had the shape of a radio tube, just one more touch to bring attention to the corporation's dominance in broadcasting. Sarnoff didn't even wait for the start of the World's Fair at the end of April. He wanted to make sure his product wouldn't be lost in the mix of inventions always featured at such expositions. Ten days before the official opening, Sarnoff staged a special presentation for the press which started with a speech to match his optimism for the medium. He stood in front of the radio tube-shaped building and told the crowd, "It is with this feeling of humbleness that I come to this moment of announcing the birth in this country of a new art so important in its implications that it is bound to affect all society."[74] Sarnoff cleverly ignored more than a decade of technical experiments and programming around the world and positioned television's beginning as that very moment in April 1939.

[74] "Dedication of RCA Seen on Television," 16.

Reporters watched Sarnoff both from the World's Fair and over W2XBS on television receivers set up at NBC's Radio City in Manhattan. After Sarnoff's speech, the programming switched back to NBC for a boxing match. The publicity stunt paid off. Sarnoff's picture, taken from a television screen, graced a page of the *New York Times* the next day. Ten days later, RCA made news again when President Franklin Roosevelt officially opened the 1939 World's Fair with a televised speech. Even veteran reporter Orrin Dunlap, who had been writing about television for more than a decade, got caught up in the television excitement stirred up by RCA's splashy presentation: "…so by sunset tonight television will have come from around the corner in quest of its destiny: to find its role in the art of amusing Americans, and to fit in with the social life of the land."[75]

The genius of RCA's television demonstration at the 1939 World's Fair can still be seen to this day. History books continue to feature the image of Sarnoff speaking into two NBC microphones at a podium draped with an RCA banner announcing the beginning of television in this country. Never mind that similar televised demonstrations had been offered in this country in various forms for almost ten years and more advanced programming could be found in England and Germany, Sarnoff had framed the "birth" of the medium to the advantage of his company. The reporters weren't the only people left with this impression. Twenty million people visited the World's Fair in the first year alone and RCA's exhibit was one of the most popular on the fairgrounds.

Among those millions of visitors were young people who later had the responsibility of presenting news on the medium. Early CBS television news pioneers such as Philip Scheffler, Chet Burger, Bob Bendick, John Hammerslough, and Larry Racies all say they got their first look at television at the World's Fair.

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[75]Orrin Dunlap, "Today's Eye-Opener," *New York Times,* 30 April 1939, sec. 11, p. 12. The next year, RCA hired Dunlap as Manager of its Department of Information, "Orrin Dunlap is Made Vice President of RCA," *Broadcasting*, 21 July 1947, 53.

Reuven Frank, who started in television news in 1950 and rose to NBC News President, has strong memories of spending time in the RCA Pavilion building, where he would "sit in a darkened room, and you could see a studio all lit, and you could see a band in there…you could see in smeary black and white (on the TV sets) what you could see very clearly in color through the window." Even with the crude reception of the early receivers, Frank remembers that moment as "marvelous" and that experience foreshadowed his love for the television and his keen understanding of the importance of the medium as a news source.[76]

But RCA didn't just want people to watch the live broadcasts. Also featured prominently in the exhibit hall were shiny new television sets. People who stepped into the building saw the receivers on display, including a see-through model designed to reveal the inner workings of this "new" invention. For as little as $200, you could buy a video adaptor for your radio. Larger sets sold for as much as $600 to $1,000. RCA expected to sell 20,000 to 40,000 sets because of the World's Fair exhibit. The estimate didn't seem outrageous since BBC programming in England had sparked the sale of more than 20,000 sets three years earlier.

But three months after its grand unveiling of television, RCA had sold fewer than a thousand television sets while thousands more sat on store shelves. Sarnoff could win over the press and get potential buyers into his building, yet he couldn't convince many people to take the next step of purchasing a new appliance. Sarnoff needed to convince a skeptical government agency that his television system was the best choice for the new medium.[77]

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[76] Reuven Frank, interview with author, 14 August 2003, Tenafly, NJ, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (RF-OH2).

[77]World's Fair television exhibit from Dunlap, "Today's Eye-Opener;" "Notes on Television," *New York Times,* 30 April 1939, sec. 11, p. 12; "1,000,000 To See Fair Opening," *New York Times,* 30 April 1939, 1; Orrin Dunlap, "Ceremony is Carried by Television As Industry Makes Its Formal Bow,"

RCA VERSUS FCC

> What a great tragedy it would be if today some heedless power, for the sake of an immediate short-sighted interest, should obstruct television's progress and leave it dwarf-like in the shadow of its own great potentialities.
>
> -James Lawrence Fly, FCC Chairman, April 2, 1940[78]

The press might have been focusing on RCA's hype concerning the future of television, but the government had been watching what the corporation had been doing behind the scenes to position itself as a power in the emerging industry.

Since RCA was so far ahead of other companies in the development of television, the company wanted the government to endorse a broadcast standard. Deciding on a common standard for transmitting and receiving a signal was more important for television than it had been for radio. Television worked on a "lock and key" system. The transmitter and receiver had to be in synchronization or the set might not be able to recreate the picture. The FCC had not allowed the television industry to progress past the experimental stage to commercial status because of the uncertainty of future development. If different manufacturers used different transmitting systems, people who invested in television sets might only be able to receive some of the broadcasts.

At the same time, the FCC didn't want to set the standards too early because the proliferation of television sets would lock in that system and future improvements wouldn't have a chance to be introduced on a widespread scale. So the government found itself trying to predict the right moment when the engineers had developed the

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New York Times, 1 May 1939, 8; "Outline of Experimental Work W2XBS;" (FCC-HD); Von Schilling, 1-9; Ritchie, 57-64; Fisher and Fisher, 276-282; Barnouw, *The Golden Web,* 126-127

[78] James Lawrence Fly, "Television," text of radio address scheduled for April 2, 1940; Television History 1939-1940; TV: Assignments: History; (FCC-HD).

technology to a point where people would be willing to spend the money on a television set without the worry that the receiver could be obsolete in a few years.

The FCC wasn't just concerned about consumers being stuck with useless hardware. The Commission also wanted to make sure a single company wouldn't be able to corner the business on television transmitting equipment and the sets themselves. The FCC was well aware that RCA had lined up almost all of the patents needed to monopolize television if the company's system was chosen as the standard.

In 1936, the Radio Manufacturers Association first proposed standards for television broadcasting. A prominent patent attorney, Samuel Darby, warned the FCC that the standards would play right into the hands of RCA. "In other words," cautioned Darby, "anyone who wishes to engage in the radio business today, or in the television business tomorrow, must ask and get the permission of RCA." [79] The FCC chose not to act on the proposed standards. Two years later, RMA once again submitted television standards. Once again, those standards happened to be the same ones used by RCA and NBC with their experimental television station. W2XBS used those proposed standards for the 1939 World's Fair broadcasts.

RCA's competitors complained that the Radio Manufacturers Association was mostly made up of people who supported RCA's television efforts. E.F. McDonald, Jr. of the Zenith Radio Corporation let the FCC know that he was worried about RCA's patent control. McDonald was on the RMA board but said he wouldn't agree to the proposed standards unless the following phrase was added into the proposal: "provided that they would not create a patent monopoly."[80]

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[79] "Chronological Development," 3, (FCC-HD).
[80] Ibid., 5.

This time, the FCC appointed three commissioners to look into the issue of locking in standards. In May 1939, while RCA was basking in the publicity from its newly-opened television exhibit at the World's Fair, the FCC television committee decided television wasn't ready and adopting standards "would freeze the art against further developments which would be contrary to public interest."[81]

AMBER LIGHT

During the rest of 1939, NBC continued to provide its television service which could be seen at the World's Fair or on the disappointingly low number of new sets, less than a thousand, sold in the New York City area. Also during this time, the FCC changed its mind about television standards. The Commission's television committee put out another report in November which suggested adopting the RMA (and RCA) standards with the provision that the standards could be changed depending on industry improvements.

This partial acceptance of RCA's system brought storms of protest from other manufacturers and broadcasters. Representatives from Philco, Allen Du Mont Laboratories, and Zenith all testified that researchers were close to significant improvements in television and the government shouldn't be setting standards which would stifle the advancements in technology.[82]

Columbia tried to position itself as above the fray but was still determined to stop RCA and NBC from moving their radio dominance into the new medium. CBS reasoned its intentions in television were purely for the public benefit since the company wasn't

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[81] Ibid., 7.

[82] Ironically, Farnsworth was the only company to stand with RCA in support of the RMA standards. Farnsworth had come to an agreement with RCA on patent royalties earlier in the year and stood to profit from RCA sales, "Chronological Development," 8, (FCC-HD).

tainted by "manufacturing or patent affiliations."[83] But Columbia clearly didn't want a repeat of its doomed mechanical system of the early 1930s as it made clear in a report to the FCC:

> Television must not attempt a public trial at public expense. Such public trial should not induce large-scale investment by broadcasters, only to destroy it. Scheduled program service must not be allowed to delude the public into buying sets that may suddenly become useless, or to betray the broadcaster into wasting his resources on abortive efforts.[84]

In February 1940, the FCC backed away from the RMA standards and reverted to its previous stance of encouraging more research. "The evidence before the Commission reveals a substantial possibility that the art may be on the threshold of significant advance."[85] Just as important in that report was approval of limited advertising later in the year. Starting in September 1940, the government would allow stations to run commercials to offset the cost of producing the programming. This wasn't the anticipated green light of commercial television nor the money-draining red light of experimental broadcasting. The FCC chose to call the change an "amber light."[86]

The FCC's concerns about a business monopoly and the interests of the public were reflected in its new leader. In September 1939, Roosevelt appointed James Lawrence Fly as the new chairman of the FCC. While Fly was new to broadcasting, he had a history of managing a limited resource against the profit incentives of industry. Fly had come to the FCC from the Tennessee Valley Authority. With the TVA, Fly was in charge of distributing the electricity produced from the dam built on the Tennessee River.

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[83] "Memorandum of the Columbia Broadcasting System, Inc., Docket No. 5806," January 31, 1940; Television 1944 Allocations 1 of 4; Television: Allocations; (FCC-HD).

[84] Ibid.

[85] "No Standards: Limited Commercialization for Television," FCC Press Release, 29 February 1940; Television History 1939-1940; TV: Assignments: History; (FCC-HD).

[86] "Amber Light Before Green Light for Television," FCC Press Release, 15 November 1939; Television: FCC Rulings 1937-39; FCC Report, Docket 5806, 29 February 1940; Television History 1939-1940; and "No Standards: Limited Commercialization for Television;" all three from TV: Assignments: History; (FCC-HD).

He had successfully fought monopolistic utility companies which felt they had a right to the money generated by the dams. He had taken one case to the U.S. Supreme Court and won. Now he was in charge of a government agency concerned with the proper usage of limited public airwaves. Maybe he saw some similarities between RCA in broadcasting and the utilities from his TVA days. Whatever the case, Fly's FCC didn't flinch when Sarnoff tried a new approach to sell more television sets.[87]

NBC JUMPS THE GUN

By March 1940, David Sarnoff wasn't thinking about amber or green lights. He was determined to get more television sets into the homes within the broadcast signal range of his television station in New York. By this time, he was eleven months into an aggressive television blitz, including a heavy schedule of programming each week and the popular television exhibit at the World's Fair. Still, those efforts hadn't even sold a thousand sets. Part of the reason for the lack of sales was the uncertainty of television's future. People didn't want to invest money in a technology which could be archaic with any new research breakthrough. If the FCC had only approved the RMA standards in 1939, people might have felt more comfortable forking over the hundreds of dollars to watch the NBC experimental station. But instead, the Commission backed off any standard in its February 1940 report and instead encouraged RCA and its competitors to continue making improvements, even if it meant uncertainty in the technology.

If Sarnoff's 1939 approach was considered a public relations effort with the World's Fair demonstrations, his 1940 plan was pure business. Not even a month after

[87]Fly and television standards from Fly, "Television;" "Chronological Development;" Barnouw, *The Golden Web,* 169-181; Von Schilling, 14-18; Fisher and Fisher, 267-283.

the FCC "amber light" report and its rejection of television standards, people had a new reason to buy a television set: price.

Starting on March 20, RCA splashed huge advertisements across the pages of New York newspapers. The company cut the prices of its television sets by a third and promised a great future for the industry. In the RCA ad, Sarnoff invited the people of New York to participate "in this effort of American private enterprise to create a new art and new industry, which should provide additional employment for the human and material resources of the nation, and contribute to greater prosperity and happiness for all of us in the years ahead." The full-page ad also promised RCA was ready to start linking together NBC television stations in a network, much like the two NBC radio networks. Sarnoff promised coverage of sporting events and even the 1940 presidential campaign.[88]

The RCA President directly challenged the authority of the FCC. The Commission clearly stated in the February report it was not yet time to start aggressively selling television sets: "nothing should be done which will encourage a large public investment in receivers which, by reason of technical advances when ultimately introduced, may become obsolete in a relatively short time."[89] Nothing like a full page ad in the *New York Times* to encourage a large public investment. Three days later the FCC turned off the amber light and ordered more hearings on television. Fly went on the radio and attacked RCA's disregard for the FCC report:

> By this sales activity alone the standards of the broadcasting science might be locked against their improvements. Under such circumstances it is rather more likely that the competitors too would be crowded into production and sales

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[88] RCA, Bloomingdale's, Davega, Abraham & Strauss Advertisements, *New York Times,* 20 March 1940, 20-22; "Breaks for Consumers," *Newsweek,* 25 March 1940, 62.

[89] "No Standards: Limited Commercialization for Television," FCC Press Release, 29 February 1940, p. 3; Television History 1939-1940; TV: Assignments: History; (FCC-HD).

> promotion. This would make it even more probable that television would be shackled at its present state and future progress obstructed.[90]

RCA ended its sales campaign within days of the FCC response. In the subsequent hearings, the FCC asked RCA to furnish a list of all its U.S. television patents. The corporation listed 764 television patents that it "owned or controlled," which didn't included hundreds of other television patents it had the right to use or the thousands of radio patents that might be applicable to television. The Commission concluded that RCA was determined to "control the time when television would be put on a commercial basis and the time must be when its patent situation was right."[91] The FCC itself took control by delaying the quasi-commercial status of television while yet another committee looked into television standards.

CHASING SARNOFF: PALEY FIGHTS FOR TELEVISION HEADLINES

Columbia found itself in a tough spot concerning television during this period. The company didn't have a television system to promote and it didn't produce any TV sets to sell. Paley wasn't sure what role television would eventually play in the media landscape. But he certainly wasn't going to let his chief competitor have the glory of television to himself. So while CBS may not have had a team of engineers pushing the boundaries of the technology, Paley worked on ways to create the illusion that his company had the same level of commitment as RCA to television's future.[92]

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[90]Fly, "Television;" "FCC Stays Start in Television, Rebukes R.C.A. for Sales Drive," *New York Times,* 24 March 1940, 1; "Television Escaping Lab Again," *Business Week,* 20 April 1940, 22; "FCC Itself on the Carpet as Television Row Boils Over," *Newsweek,* 22 April 1940, 44.

[91] "Chronological Development," 11.

[92] Public relations and publicity had always been important to Paley. One of the first people he hired when he took over the fledgling, almost-bankrupt network was Edward Bernays, who is known as the father of public relations. Bernays helped to build up the reputation of Columbia before he was fired by Paley's right-hand man, Ed Klauber, Smith, 70-71, 118-119.

When Sarnoff made news by promising an additional million dollar investment in television, Paley told his crew to come up with a bigger and better transmitter for CBS. No matter that the company's W2XAB station had been off the air for years, Paley wanted bragging rights. Since NBC already had its transmitter on the tallest building in town, the Empire State Building, CBS settled for second tallest, the Chrysler Building. Even though its equipment would be almost 300 feet lower than NBC's, Columbia explained its location was better since the Chrysler building had an unobstructed view of midtown Manhattan and farther north which had "the biggest market for television receivers."[93]

Next, Paley wanted a larger television studio than RCA, even though CBS didn't have an operating television station at the time. Across the street from the Chrysler Building, CBS engineers found their future studio, one floor above the waiting area at the Grand Central Terminal. Before leasing the space, engineers had to carefully measure the area and compare it to RCA's studio, which was actually being used for television programming at the time. Even though the Grand Central location wasn't as tall as NBC's studio, it was longer and wider. So CBS could boast of having the largest television studio in the world. The press release proudly listed the dimensions as "225 feet in length, 60 feet in width, and 40 feet from floor to ceiling." [94]

Paley had now committed his company to buying and installing a new transmitter as well as leasing and constructing a massive television studio; projects that would together cost close to a million dollars. At the same time, CBS didn't even own a working television camera.[95]

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[93] "Columbia Moves In on Television," *Business Week,* 10 April 1937, 20.

[94] "Gilbert Seldes is Selected to Direct CBS Experimental Television Programs," CBS Press Release, 20 August 1937; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL).

[95]Information on transmitter and studio plans from Peter C. Goldmark, *Maverick Inventor: My Turbulent Years at CBS* (New York: Saturday Review Press/E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc, 1973), 49-51; "Gilbert

While Paley might not have fully realized television's potential during that era, CBS wasn't without its television boosters. Vice President Paul Kesten talked so much about television he became known as vice-president of the future. Even though the few television viewers in New York hadn't been able to see any example of CBS's belief in television since W2XAB went off the air in 1933, Kesten kept the idea alive within Columbia. In 1935, he read an article on the potential of television written by a Hungarian inventor who had recently moved to the United States. Kesten tracked down Peter Goldmark and hired him in 1936 to start working on CBS's next attempt at the visual medium. Kesten and Goldmark slowly started to build a staff of engineers to put together the system worthy of the biggest studio and a powerful transmitter.[96]

"ERRORS IN ADVANCE:" CBS EXPERIMENTS WITH VISUAL FORMAT

> At home we shall not be compelled to sit through a dull episode in silence, hoping for an exciting one to follow. We will, in short, look into the mirror of television only so long as the movement upon it is of surpassing interest.
>
> -Gilbert Seldes, "The 'Errors' of Television," 1937[97]

While the inventors and engineers got most of the attention in early television as they wrestled with technology issues and fought each other in court over patents and ideas, other people struggled with an equally important task for the new medium: what do you put on it? What type of programming will work well on the small screen? They could look to similar entertainment sources such as radio, theater, vaudeville and movies

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Seldes is Selected"; "Columbia Moves In On Television," Untitled CBS Press Release, 10 January 1939; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL).

[96] Goldmark, 36-48; Kisseloff, 70-72.

[97] Gilbert Seldes, "The 'Errors' of Television," *Atlantic Monthly,* May 1937, 535. His reference to 'mirror' describes early television sets that projected the picture straight up and a mirror on top of the console reflected the image at an angle that the viewer could watch.

for clues. But television would be different. Early programmers, performers, and directors fretted over the proper course to follow.

If CBS had wanted to find someone with television experience to lead its future programming efforts, the company certainly could have found someone with the credentials. NBC's experimental station had been running television programs on and off since the late 1920s. General Electric's Schenectady station had staged the first television drama as far back as 1928. Don Lee's station in Los Angeles had been experimenting with newsreels and even feature-length motion pictures. Over in England, the BBC was in the midst of an ambitious television program schedule that continued to grow until the war shut it down. Columbia even had people on staff with television experience from the network's earlier attempt at television from 1931 to 1933. During that period, W2XAB ran everything from wrestling, boxing, news programs, talk shows, art exhibitions, classic dancing, musical comedies, dancing and even piano lessons.

But the network took a different approach in choosing its visionary for the visual medium. Once again, just like the hiring of Peter Goldmark for the technical side, a magazine article sparked the hiring of Columbia's new television program director.

By 1937, Gilbert Seldes was already a well-known writer. He had authored a dozen books including an influential work on popular entertainment, *The Seven Lively Arts*. He worked as a drama critic, a radio commentator, and had even had success on Broadway. He also had access to a television set and spent some time in the mid-1930s watching the experimental programming.

Seldes presented his thoughts, hopes, and predictions for television in an article for *The Atlantic Monthly* in May 1937 with the intriguing title, "The 'Errors' of Television." As with many of the articles exploring early television, Seldes critiqued the technology: "pictures tend to be distorted at the top and bottom of the screen;" but he also

looked beyond the equipment to the programming coming through the screen. He believed television would demand our attention to a much greater degree than radio because of the addition of visuals. As a result, Seldes argued people would have a shorter attention span since they were watching so closely. "The moment television is added, the dynamics of a programme must be changed and the rate of presentation must be accelerated."

In the article, Seldes criticized both silent movies and radio for stealing second-rate entertainment from an earlier era, "as the silent movies took over melodrama from the stage and radio took over the dialect comedian from vaudeville." He hoped that television would aim higher with its early programming. "It would be a great thing if television could from the start combine the best of the two forms of entertainment which ultimately, I believe, it will supersede."[98]

Three months later, Seldes had the chance to start putting his views of television to the ultimate test. CBS hired Gilbert Seldes as its "experimental television program director" in August 1937. The network hadn't even begun work on constructing the massive studio in the Grand Central Terminal when he started his job. For Seldes, the lack of a working station fit into his plans of early experimentation. Just like the "trial and error, particularly error" period that he predicted in his earlier article, as programming director he preached making "errors in advance" so the medium would be ready for quality broadcasts when the audience started growing:

> The entertainment value of the early programs, plus the novelty value, ought to attract widespread interest. As the novelty value decreases, the improvement in the programs themselves should bring television entertainment up to the current level of other matured forms of entertainment.[99]

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[98] Seldes, "The 'Errors' of Television," 541.

[99] "Gilbert Seldes is Selected."

Seldes had a long time to experiment before subjecting viewers to his vision. Close to two years would pass before CBS once again fired up its experimental station, W2XAB. But that time allowed Seldes to put together a team to accelerate television's maturation process. Among the small group of people he hired to work on television included Rudy Bretz--who would play a big role in the graphic look of CBS-TV in the early years; Edward Anhalt--who later became a successful screenwriter in Hollywood, Richard Hubbell, Robert Bendick, Ruth Norman, Phillip Booth, Paul Mowrey, Stephen Marvin, Marshall Diskin, James Leaman, and Richard Rawls.[100]

Seldes picked another television outsider for the key role of production manager. He hired Worthington Miner, who had been a successful director on Broadway. Miner was certainly prepared for the stress of live television of later years; he estimated he had directed 30 different Broadway plays in ten years. He also had spent some time in Hollywood making movies. Miner worked the next 20 years in television, adapting his stage and movie work to the small screen.

During those experimental years, members of the CBS crew broke down the medium to its most basic level as they tried to understand what would work on television. This crew looked at television from all angles. At first, they weren't concerned about specific programming, just the basic visual components. They didn't have the well-defined job descriptions of later years so each one of them would haul around a film camera, direct a live program, or even pull cables in the studio if necessary.

The crew would drag three film cameras to football games, set them up in different parts of the stadium, and then shoot the game and crowd from the different angles. Then they'd return to the studio, develop the film, and sit in a room and critique what they saw on the tiny screen. "It was fascinating," remembers Bendick, "you were

[100]Hubbell, *Television Programming,* vi-vii.

starting to learn about the small box, (the frame) couldn't have a great amount of information because people couldn't see it and it couldn't be absorbed… so it was a great education and learning process."[101] He also remembers going to the seashore and just shooting the surf. They thought people might want to sit at home and watch the waves crashing into the shore.

Much of their early experimenting happened in the massive studio above the Grand Central Terminal. They produced live programs that ranged from drama, interviews shows, to badminton. The massive studio cameras were still so primitive in those days that the camera operator actually saw the image upside down and in reverse in the viewfinder. "We had to learn that if we saw something going to the left," said Bendick, "we had to pan to the right." Bretz said it got to the point where he could see things quite well upside down, even to the point of reading upside-down menus in restaurants.[102]

With the exception of short films, all of the programs were presented live. Videotape was years in the future and there was no affordable way to record a broadcast in advance. Bendick quickly learned the live aspect of television added in an important element of suspense because "you never knew, regardless of what the subject was…you didn't know what was coming the next minute." They learned how to frame the actors to also create tension for the viewer. "If you always kept everything right in the center, reflected Bendick, "it doesn't give you a sense of leaving something on the outside that might happen."[103]

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[101]Robert Bendick, interview by author, 18 August 2003, Guilford, CT, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (RB-OH2).

[102] Kisseloff, 73.

[103] Bendick interview, (RB-OH2)

Television news pioneers didn't follow a common path to the new medium. Each person has a unique story on becoming involved in the new format. Robert Bendick found television through a photography background. He was born in 1917 and grew up in New York City. He got his first camera when he was still a kid and quickly fell in love with photography. Bendick skipped college and instead went straight from high school to the White School of Photography in New York run by photographer Clarence White. Bendick did so well at the school that his photographs were published in *Fortune, Look,* and *Life* while he was still a student.

After photography school, he worked as a freelance photographer for publications such as *National Geographic*. Bendick got his real start in moving pictures when he was picked to replace a sick cameraman for a fishing film set to begin production in Canada. The person in charge of the project, Bob Edge, liked Bendick's work and hired him for two other similar films.

Edge later went to work for CBS and remembered Bendick when the television crew needed an extra cameraman. Tony Miner hired him in March 1940 and Bendick joined the small group that had started doing experimental broadcasts the previous year. To this day, Bendick says he was lucky to be involved in the early experiments at CBS although he admits needing a little courage to take a chance on the unknown medium.[104]

Bendick and the others continued to try different programming and production techniques under the guidance of Seldes and Miner for the rest of 1940 and the first part of 1941.[105] An early member of the crew, Richard Hubbell, boasted that the original CBS Television Program Department was "perhaps the only true 'laboratory' of television

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[104]Robert Bendick, interview by author, 2 July 2003, Guilford, CT, telephone audiotape interview, (RB-OH1); Bendick interview, (RB-OH2).

[105]CBS programming experiments from Bendick interviews, (RB-OH1, RB-OH2); Hubbell, *Television Programming,* 85-148; Columbia Broadcasting System, *1938 Annual Report*, (CBS-RL); KIsseloff, 69-79.

programming in prewar America."[106] These people continued to make their "errors in advance" to live up to Seldes' bold prediction at the start of 1939 that "by the time television is ready for general use it should be prepared to give entertainment of the same quality as that being purveyed in present-day sound broadcasts."[107]

FCC INCHES TOWARDS COMMERCIAL TELEVISION

Some of the people who may have witnessed the CBS visual experiments in late 1940 included engineers working on television standards. The latest FCC committee looking into television, The National Television Systems Committee (NTSC), spent part of 1940 and early 1941 visiting experimental stations around the country in search of a common broadcast standard. After Chairman Fly and the FCC shut down RCA's attempt to flood the New York market with television receivers, the government agency started to come under attack for stifling the growth of television. President Roosevelt even met with both Sarnoff and Fly to try and break the impasse. The U.S. Senate held hearings on television after a few members questioned the FCC's heavy-handed approach. The Senate committee didn't reach any decisions, but the FCC responded by forming the NTSC. The committee was expected to reach some kind of consensus on a common broadcast system by 1941 so commercial service could finally begin.

1940 Political Conventions

Even with the government rebuff, RCA's experimental station continued operating for most of 1940. People who purchased a receiver had a chance that summer and fall to watch the first inkling of the power television would eventually have over presidential politics. The Republicans scheduled their convention for Philadelphia, which

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[106] Richard Hubbell, *Television Programming,* vi-vii.

[107] CBS, Untitled Press Release, 10 January 1939; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL).

was the home of Philco's experimental station, W3XE. Three of the top television leaders put aside their usual competition to piece together the first real television network. Philco, RCA, and General Electric found a way to take the broadcast from Convention Hall in Philadelphia and bring it to the television viewers not only in Philadelphia, but also in New York City and Schenectady, New York. The convention provided the drama and surprises that would be so important in television programming. The Republican front runners who wanted the chance to face Franklin Roosevelt included former President Herbert Hoover, Ohio's Robert Taft and New York's Thomas Dewey.

But the star of the convention proved to be a dark horse from Indiana who had never before run for public office. Wendell Willkie brought just a few delegates with him to the Philadelphia convention. But through some strong backroom dealings and negotiations, viewers watched as roll call after roll changed the course of the campaign. With each vote, delegates turned away from Dewey and Taft and put their support with Willkie. By 2:00 A.M., the Republicans had nominated the political novice. Worthington Miner watched the Republican Convention on television that summer. Miner, who later was credited with creating some of the best live dramas in television's golden years, admitted the picture quality was "gruesome," but still he kept watching because "the tension and restlessness kept building, until that explosive moment when the final votes that put Wendell Willkie over the top were recorded." Miner remembered that broadcast as an early sign of television's potential power.[108]

Viewers didn't see live coverage as the Democrats nominated Roosevelt for a third run at the Presidency because that convention city, Chicago, didn't yet have live

[108]Worthington Miner, *Worthington Miner: A Directors Guild of America Oral History* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1985), 166.

television capabilities. On election night both RCA and Du Mont provided coverage of the vote counts on their experimental stations in New York City.[109]

FCC PICKS A DATE

In the spring of 1941, the FCC approved the standards recommended by its television committee. The commission also voted to allow stations to start running commercials if those stations could guarantee 15 hours of programming each week as well as meet certain technology standards. The approved standards were mostly in line with RCA's experimental station, with a few modifications. The FCC-approved standards only pertained to black and white pictures. The question of color television pitted CBS against RCA and would involve bitter struggles for a common system during the next dozen years.

Even with this apparent victory, Sarnoff wasn't as eager to take the lead on television this time around. Much had changed in the year since the advertising blitz to sell televisions in March 1940. First of all, RCA hadn't been able to sell that many receivers. Plus, even though the company could now charge advertisers for commercials, the cost of providing 15 hours of programming would be significant. But most importantly, the world was a dramatically different place in the spring of 1941. The Nazis took over Paris the previous summer. England had been under air attack ever since. Germany was poised on the Russian border to start an advance on that country. More and more, the talk in this country centered on the potential of U.S. involvement in the war. At RCA, war involvement wasn't just a debate, but a reality. The corporation

[109]1940 television convention coverage from "Television Brings Convention Here," *New York Times,* 25 June 1940, 20; "60 Mikes for Politics: Three Big Networks Are Ready for National Conventions," *Newsweek,* 24 June 1940, 41; Von Schilling, 24-28.

already had $40 million in defense contracts in 1941 and had stopped most production of new television sets because of defense-related orders.

No matter the world conditions and diverted attentions, the Federal Communications Commission decided the United States was finally ready for commercial television. In a report and order released in May, the FCC designated July 1, 1941 as the beginning of commercial television in this country.[110]

[110]"Chronological Development," 13-15; Mickie Edwardson, "Blitzkrieg Over Television: James Lawrence Fly v. David Sarnoff," *Journalism History* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 42-52; Barnouw, *The Golden Web*, 126-128,145; Stashower, 243-246; Fisher and Fisher, 289-296; Von Schilling, 21-24.

Chapter 3

The Ambitious Birth of CBS-TV News

Two very different worlds came together in April 1941 when a couple of young employees of the Columbia Broadcasting System met for the first time. In their short broadcasting careers at CBS, Robert Skedgell and Richard Hubbell represented the pinnacle of public adulation and the murky depths of mostly-unseen experimental programming for the network.

Skedgell came from the 17th floor at 485 Madison Avenue, the nerve center of CBS News. Even though he was only 21 years old, he had already worked alongside people such as Robert Trout, H.V. Kaltenborn, and Elmer Davis, men who had become important national figures for their reports and commentary on the war in Europe. He had stood in Paul White's office and heard the voices of Murrow, Shirer, and Sevareid as they called in to New York from across the world as Germany unleashed its hell across Europe.

Skedgell had witnessed the transformation of CBS's public affairs broadcasts into a critical news service for the nation, so he had mixed feelings about his recent promotion to writer. He not only wouldn't be working on the 17th floor with the famed CBS News crew, he would be thrust into the entirely new world of television which he viewed as "a mystical thing in the sky." Skedgell certainly didn't own a television set, he hadn't even seen one until he was assigned to television duty. He read about the RCA experiments at the 1939 World's Fair, but he never got a chance to visit the exhibit. "I had an idea what it was," remembered Skedgell, "but didn't really know."[111]

[111]Skedgell interview, (RS-OH2).

Hubbell had spent all of his short tenure at CBS struggling with the "mystical thing in the sky," having been part of the original staff hired in the late 1930s. Hubbell spent that time learning the new visual format alongside Seldes, Miner, Bendick and the others. He made his "errors in advance" learning about camera angles, microphones, and lighting techniques for the medium which Seldes had dubbed "postage stamp art" because of the tiny television screen of that period.[112] Not many people saw those visual experiments since fewer than 5,000 receivers sat in New York homes and taverns, but Hubbell was proud of his affiliation with the CBS Television Programming Department, which he reminded people had been described by others as "the brain trusters" and the "*avant-garde* of American television."[113]

Historically, this meeting started the collaboration which resulted in the beginning of CBS Television News. Dan Rather's broadcasts of today and all nightly newscasts in the half-century between can trace their roots to the work set in motion by a couple of young CBS staffers with fewer than four years of broadcast experience between them.

Considering personnel, Columbia certainly didn't view the pending television newscasts as programming worthy of special effort. For the news side, Paul White had picked a copy boy to be in charge of news judgment and content. For the television side, Hubbell had been assigned to the newscast because of his work with the original crew. That was it. Skedgell and Hubbell. No one else. Others were certainly involved in the newscasts on a daily basis, but CBS only assigned those two people as full-time television news employees. Skedgell had worked in the radio newsroom so he was in charge of putting together the rundown and writing the copy. But he had never even talked into a microphone as a reporter or announcer. So Hubbell became the face of

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[112] Kisseloff, 73.

[113] Hubbell, *Television Programming,* vi.

CBS-TV News. He would read the copy on camera. Plus, with Hubbell's production background, he worked with the rest of the television crew to find ways to visualize the news, using the crude materials available at that time.

They didn't even have a real office. Most of the vast Grand Central Terminal space was devoted to studio space, but the top CBS television administrators, such as Adrian Murphy, Gilbert Seldes, and Worthington Miner, had offices. So did the engineers working on future advancements, such as color television. But the CBS-TV News Department didn't even warrant walls or a door. Instead, Skedgell and Hubbell's work area was signified by a low spindle railing, similar to what would be found in a bank or insurance office at the time. Inside the railing, they each had a desk, a couple of filing cabinets and they shared a hat rack. The only nod to the journalistic mission at hand was a lone United Press Radio wire machine.[114]

When Skedgell and Hubbell first met in April 1941, the network didn't know when the television newscasts would start. CBS, NBC and all other companies involved in experimental television were all waiting for the FCC to decide on a timetable for commercial television. The July 1st date wasn't announced until May, which gave the two men fewer than two months to craft a format for presenting news on television.

Skedgell might have had a couple of years of CBS News experience at the time of his promotion to television, but little in his background before CBS pointed to a career in news. He was born in 1919 in Massachusetts and grew up in southern New Jersey. Skedgell's father wanted him to be a chemical engineer so he left home for Lehigh University outside Allentown, Pennsylvania in the summer of 1937. He transferred from Lehigh to the University of Virginia a year and a half later. During his year on the

[114]Robert Skedgell, interview by author, 7 July 2003, Jamaica Estates, NY, Telphone interview, audiotape recording, (RS-OH1), (RS-OH2); Bliss, 218-221.

Virginia campus, he realized the schools weren't the problem, but instead it was the world outside the campus. Skedgell remembers reading about the widening war in Europe, the debate over U.S. involvement "and all the devil was breaking loose and here I was studying biology and taking frogs apart." He felt cut off from the world so the 20-year old quit college and headed for New York City.

Skedgell forgot about chemical engineering and decided he wanted to be a reporter. He had never taken any journalism classes and hadn't even worked on a school newspaper. He just knew he wanted to be a part of what was going on in the world:

> It was such a fascinating period of time, so many wonderful, exciting, and horrible people at that time—Hitler, Mussolini, Babe Ruth, and Charlie Chaplin. They were newsmakers and they fascinated me. Just the idea that I might be able to record some of this in some way, shape or form…[115]

When he got to New York City, he found out that employers weren't as excited about his plans for a reporting career. With no experience and a very tight job market, Skedgell had no luck getting on with a newspaper. Running out of money, he went to Macy's and said he'd sweep the floors. He couldn't even get that job. Finally he turned to his brother, who worked for the Young & Rubicam advertising agency. His brother got him an interview with the personnel director at CBS.

But Skedgell wasn't to join the exalted CBS News crew just yet. Instead, CBS hired him as a page at $14.50 a week. As a page, he was that era's equivalent of an internal e-mail program. Skedgell would take messages from department to department. Although it wasn't the most glamorous or high-paying job, he said it gave him an opportunity to see all parts of CBS, from the executive offices to the newsroom on the 17th floor. He spent as much time in the newsroom as possible without neglecting his

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[115] both "all the devil was breaking loose…" and "fascinating period of time…" from Skedgell interview, (RS-OH2).

other duties. He got to know some of the people there and let them know he would like to help out in any way possible.

Soon Skedgell was working in the news department when the staff needed extra help on the weekends. That led to his first promotion; from page to copy boy. As copy boy, which also carried the more mature title of desk assistant, Skedgell helped monitor the numerous wire service machines in the newsroom. He watched for big stories to break and made sure the constantly-running machines didn't run out of paper. During the slower parts of the news day, he could also work on his writing and help the radio editors and writers in their duties. For all desk assistants, the next step up on the ladder at CBS news was to be picked as a writer. Skedgell started aiming for that goal as early as 1939. He envisioned his words being read by a famous CBS radio announcer, not a member of the experimental television program department. Skedgell's chance at advancing from copy boy to writer came with television.

FRANTIC RACE FOR TELEVISION'S CURTAIN RISE

Skedgell and Hubbell of the CBS-TV News Department certainly weren't the only two people warily eyeing the July 1st deadline. Government and industry leaders had been talking about commercial television for so many years, the announcement itself came as quite a wake-up call. Any operation that wanted to be in on it from the beginning had sixty days to get its broadcasting equipment up and working and their studios ready for constant use. The biggest chore would be coming up with 15 hours of programming a week, knowing that most of those hours would be live.[116]

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[116] The FCC had wanted stations to run at least 30 hours of programs weekly but station owners complained the expense would be too high for the limited advertising money they would be able to collect in the beginning. The commissioners cut the minimum programming hours in half as a result. "Commercial Television Given Nod by F.C.C.," *Variety*, 7 May 1941, 32.

NBC Gets Ready

NBC seemed to be in the best position to make the transition to commercial television. W2XBS kept up an ambitious schedule of 18 hours a week during the first year of its World's Fair broadcasts. The weekly programming hours had been cut back to eight in April 1940 and had stayed at that level for more than a year. So the NBC station had more than a thousand hours of programming experience leading up to July 1st. Still, the station had to now almost double its eight hour a week schedule, so it needed to quickly hire back staff that had been involved in earlier efforts.

Sarnoff's company was strangely silent about its television plans up until the final days before the premiere. The company that built an entire exhibition at the World's Fair two years earlier to promote television wouldn't even release its program schedule a week before the first day. A press release on NBC's plans was pulled before ever being released.[117] Five days before the launch of commercial television, NBC unveiled the first advertising rate card for television. If an advertiser wanted to sponsor an hour during what is now called prime time on NBC-TV in the summer of 1941, the cost would be $120. The amount dropped to $90 for a Sunday afternoon and $60 for a weekday afternoon.[118]

CBS Gears Up For Service

CBS had a much larger mountain to climb before July 1st. Construction crews and engineers were still working on the massive Grand Central Terminal studios up until the deadline to be ready for the opening day. Just eleven days before the start of commercial television, the network considered its plans as "tentative." CBS complained of trouble finding "trained personnel, equipment, and replacement parts" so the company didn't

[117]"No Television News, Just a Banquet," *Variety,* 25 June 1941, 23.
[118]"RCA-NBC Sponsored Television Gets Underway in New York," *Variety,* 2 July 1941, 3.

want to be held to the July 1st start date. CBS spent more than $900,000 to get the station ready for operation and estimated it would be spending almost $67,000 per week to offer the minimum program hours.[119]

The CBS Television Programming Department also had to get serious. The months of running long films of waves crashing into the shore and studying various camera angles from football games were over. The *avant-garde* of early television had to come up with 15 hours of programming people might want to watch.

Four years before, when he was merely a critic of television and not responsible for the programming, Gilbert Seldes warned the industry not to stoop to the second-rate entertainment that he thought had marred the early years of movies and radio. But now Seldes, as well as the other stations, was turning to an old reliable entertainment source to help fill some hours: vaudeville. In the weeks leading up to July 1st, *The New York Times* reported on the frantic efforts to find talent that would work on the visual medium:

> Constant streams of performers during the past week have paraded before televiewcameras in the three New York studios, where auditions, it is said, may be had almost for the asking. Few are turned away. Columbia television men are working at top speed to 'see and hear' all comers that have talent.[120]

Better Standards Mean Set Adjustments

The two month window between the announcement and beginning of commercial television didn't only mean long hours for the television programmers and engineers, but for the people who sold and repaired television sets as well. The FCC decision not only set a date for commercial television; it tentatively set standards for the broadcast signal.

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[119]"CBS Announces Tentative Television Plans," CBS Press Release, 20 June 1941, CBS News Reference Library; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL); WCBW-TV FCC Construction Permit, 23 June 1941; WCBS 1/23/43-12/31/46; Deleted Broadcast Licenses, Accession 5804; Records of the Federal Communications Commission; Record Group 173; National Archives at College Park; (FCC-DB).

[120]T.R. Kennedy Jr., "Television Will Enter Its Commercial Phase This Week," *New York Times,* 29 June 1941, Sec. 9, p. 10.

For years, the FCC had been worried about setting a standard too quickly which could either retard future research or dupe people into buying television sets which might not be usable in the future. The 1941 FCC decision on standards was fairly close to what RCA and NBC had been pushing for years, but included enough changes that television set owners couldn't be guaranteed of getting the channels clearly without taking their massive piece of furniture back to the dealer for retrofitting.

The FCC decision improved the picture from 441 lines per screen to 525, and settled on FM for the audio portion of the signal.[121] Since RCA sold the most television sets, it had built its receivers for the 441 line system used by the NBC experimental station in New York. With the upgrade to 525 lines, the sets had to be adjusted for the new signal. Plus, RCA built many of the sets with the primary purpose of receiving NBC's station which broadcast on Channel 1. Those sets now needed "fairly expensive" readjustments to pick up other channels.[122]

Other Channels

CBS and NBC get the majority of attention in the early years, but they weren't the only stations and New York wasn't the only city involved in the build-up for commercial television. Also in New York, Allen Du Mont's company had been running an experimental station on Channel 4 and had hopes for becoming a commercial station later in the summer. General Electric's pioneering station in Schenectady, W2XB, went off the air in December 1940 to start building a new studio. GE wasn't ready for the July deadline but its station signed on as WRGB in February 1942. Philco's long-time

[121] In hindsight, those who were worried that an FCC decision on standards would retard future improvement in the television picture had good reason for their concern. The 525 line per screen standard survives to this day in most U.S. television broadcasts. We are only now seeing a better picture with the gradual shift to high definition television. Incidentally, 525 was a random number chosen by an engineer as a compromise between RCA's 441 line system and 625 which was adopted in England, Fisher and Fisher, 46, 294-295.

[122]Robert J. Landry, "Shows Without Audiences," *Variety,* 28 May 1941, 25.

Philadelphia station continued with experimental programming during this period and later joined the commercial ranks as WPTZ. Balaban and Katz ran a station in Chicago which later became WBKB and Don Lee Broadcasting in Los Angeles continued its television efforts with a station later known as KTSL.[123]

COMMERCIAL TELEVISION'S FIRST DAY

NBC gets the distinction of putting the commercial into commercial television. On Tuesday, July 1st, 1941, NBC Television showed a close-up of a clock face with the name "Bulova" prominently displayed on the screen. In reality, it wasn't really a clock, but a television test pattern that had been adapted to look like a time piece. Lucky viewers watched for an entire minute as the second hand moved around the clock. For that subtle mix of advertising and community service, the watch maker paid the network four dollars.[124]

The viewer of those early days of commercial television didn't have to worry about ad clutter. Only NBC had permission from the FCC to run commercials in the early months. The commission had created a threshold of goals, both in programming and broadcast transmission, for stations to meet if they wanted to qualify as a commercial station. Only NBC was in a position to meet all of those goals by the July 1st deadline.

RCA is one big reason why CBS and other stations couldn't qualify as commercial stations in the early months. Since the NBC's parent company owned most of the television patents, competitors had to buy much of their broadcasting equipment from RCA. While there may have been some special foot-dragging to give NBC an

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[123]In addition to previous references, build up to commercial television from "CBS Announces Tentative Television Plans," CBS Press Release, 20 June 1941; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL); "Commercial Television Given Nod by F.C.C.," *Variety,* 7 May 1941, 32; Landry, "Shows Without Audiences."

[124]R.W. Stewart, "Imagery For Profit," *New York Times* 6 July 1941, Sec. 9, p. 10.

advantage, more importantly, RCA had already switched much of its manufacturing from broadcasting to defense products by the spring of 1941. Realizing other stations had no control over delivery of needed equipment, the FCC allowed those stations to operate under the same rules as a commercial station, just without the commercials.

So on July 1 1941, two New York City experimental television stations finally shed their confusing mix of numbers and letters and took on more memorable call signs. NBC's W2XBS became WNBT on Channel 1, CBS's W2XAB transformed into WCBW on Channel 2[125].

During that first day, you could watch television both during the afternoon for a few hours and then again at night. The FCC had not only required the 15 hour weekly minimum for programming, but the government also determined that at least one hour a day had to occur during the evening hours. Both stations chose to sign on at 2:30pm each afternoon for a few hours. At night, CBS ran for ninety minutes starting at 8:00pm with NBC coming back on the air at 9:00pm for a few hours of programming.

NBC First Week Programming

Since NBC and RCA had spent the previous few years working on live telecasts from various events around New York, WNBT kept its mobile television equipment and crews busy with sporting events for the premiere week. The first program on Channel 1 on July 1st was a Brooklyn Dodgers-Philadelphia Phillies baseball game from Ebbets Field. For the next four afternoons, WNBT brought its viewers live tennis matches from Jackson Heights. During the evening hours, WNBT offered a fund-raising special for the United Service Organization (U.S.O.) on the first night, followed by the film "Death

[125]The Du Mont experimental station, W2XWV, went on the air in April, 1940, but didn't receive its commercial license until May 1944, when the station call letters became WABD, David Weinstein, *The Forgotten Network: DuMont and the Birth of American Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 191.

From a Distance," a live variety show, a spelling bee, and other programs on subsequent evenings.

Critics were not kind to NBC's initial efforts. Concerning the baseball game, the reviewer admitted watching the game on a set that hadn't yet been adjusted from 441 to 525 lines, therefore the game "had all the usual television disadvantages on baseball plus some definition blur." But the reviewer admitted that because of the bright day, "on occasion, the white pill could be seen cutting the air."[126] That night's ceremony for the USO fund drive also prompted harsh words from one reviewer: "the two ladies had a startled where-am-I look when they got the cue to talk and the scripts of all the speakers were written in that dull, logrolling monotone characteristic of organization officers congratulating each other."[127]

WNBT also filled its programming hours by adapting popular radio programs for television, with mixed results. During that first week, both "Uncle Jim's Question Bee" and Ralph Edwards' "Truth or Consequences" debuted on the visual side of NBC. The two main guests promoted for "Uncle Jim's Question Bee" didn't show up and replacements had to be found at the last minute. "Truth or Consequences" continued its radio format of putting people in strange situations with hopefully hilarious results. One reviewer watched as a contestant's "consequence" was to crawl into a stranger's lap and cry like a baby while "prop boys…rush a length of cloth between the fat gent's legs and tie him up in a diaper. All good clean radio fun, but it helped to begin television under commercial sponsorship on a pretty low level." The review ended with a warning: "May destiny preserve this nation from the terrible example of smart-alekism which, with the

[126]"Television's 1st Day," *Variety,* 2 July 1941, 3.
[127]"Television's Pioneer Sponsors," *Variety,* 9 July 1941, 30.

aid of television if ever organized nationally, this kind of drunk-while-sober behavior represents."[128]

Those harsh words came despite NBC's thousand hours of programming experience during the previous two years, not to mention all of the experimental broadcasts stretching back to the 1920s. CBS, on the other hand, hadn't even been experimenting for two years and now had to come up with the same number of hours of programming, with less sophisticated equipment.

CBS Debut

Columbia certainly ran its share of vaudeville-style programs on WCBW, but the station also attempted some different approaches to the medium and played up the experimental nature of early television. On the first day, "Jack in the Beanstalk" received its first television treatment. But instead of attempting to re-create the children's story with young actors and props, WCBW set up a simple story-telling scene with an actress portraying a mother reading the story and a daughter sitting at her feet listening.[129] While mother Lydia Perera read the story aloud, another camera was trained on animator John Rupe who drew descriptive and sometimes funny drawings to illustrate the popular story. The creative but simple approach to the program appealed to the same reviewer who would suffer through "Truth or Consequences" on that first day; "It was a pleasant, nostalgic reminder in simple—beautifully simple—terms and it provided a first rate sample of fluid, unfettered approach to the production problems of television."[130]

Another early effort on CBS involved trying to bring the Metropolitan Museum of Art to the home viewer. The museum would transport paintings, prints and other works

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[128]"Truth or Consequences," *Variety,* 9 July 1941, 30.
[129]The young girl was played by Ann Francis.
[130]"Jack and the Beanstalk," *Variety,* 9 July 1941, 34.

of art to the Grand Central Terminal studios so that pieces of the Metropolitan's priceless collection could be broadcast to people who had never been inside the museum. Museum Director Francis Henry Taylor had high hopes for the medium on that first broadcast:

> We hope the day may not be far off when we can telecast the great treasures into every home and classroom of the nation. When that day is reached the visual senses of the American people will rival the musical ear, which radio has done so much to develop.[131]

Showing paintings on crude, black-and-white, pre-war television sets might not have been the most exciting moment in broadcast history, but the critics certainly couldn't fault the station for aiming too low with its programming.

CBS didn't just offer high-brow art shows, children's stories, and vaudeville acts in its first hours of broadcasting. WCBW also scheduled news--a lot of news. In fact, during the months leading up to Pearl Harbor, WCBW devoted more time daily to regularly-scheduled newscasts in the afternoon/early evening hours than the CBS Television Network offered until Walter Cronkite's broadcast expanded to a half-hour in 1963. If you subtract out commercial time, CBS-TV has never again reached the amount of afternoon/early evening news it offered during the last six months of 1941.

CBS-TV PRE-WAR NEWSCASTS

Robert Skedgell and Richard Hubbell sat in their open air "office" at Grand Central Terminal and worked on what they could do with these theoretical, and soon to be real, newscasts. They had the dual challenge of figuring out first how they would fill the time, and then, how would they visualize that information. The two young men weren't expecting much help from their higher-ups. On the radio side, Paul White had

[131]R.W. Stewart, "Imagery For Profit."

picked Skedgell for the job, but he didn't get involved in the structure or production of the newscast. On the television side, neither Gilbert Seldes nor Worthington Miner had news experience. Seldes was more concerned with coming up with interesting, high-brow programming to help fulfill his earlier promise to offer entertainment "on the highest possible level"[132] when television debuted. Miner came out of a theater background so he was most concerned with how to use the primitive cameras for drama, dance, and other more visual programs. Miner would direct some of the early newscasts, but he didn't get heavily involved in the production or content.

Guidance may not have been coming from above, but the two men did get help from others working in the Grand Central studios. With the exception of Skedgell and Hubbell, most of the other people at CBS-TV worked on all of the programs. Bob Bendick and Eddie Anhalt ran studio camera for most of the programs. So they would be able to throw out some ideas on proper places to place the cameras, or where to position Hubbell so he looked best through the camera. Plus, Rudy Bretz became invaluable for his sense of graphics. Bretz was heavily involved in the news on a daily basis as the crew struggled with the question of visualizing the news.

30 Minutes of News

The CBS TV Programming Department gave CBS-TV News a critical role in its first television schedule. News would fill 30 minutes of time Monday through Friday. Plus, the news would be split up into two 15-minute newscasts; one at 2:30 P.M. and the other at 8:00 P.M. The newscasts would be the first thing the viewer saw after a half-hour of a test pattern preceding both the afternoon and evening broadcast sessions. Plus each newscast was really 15 minutes of news. WCBW hadn't yet attained commercial

[132]Untitled CBS Press Release, 10 January 1939, (CBS-RL).

status so there weren't any commercial breaks in the middle, or teases to promote the stories after the non-existent commercial breaks, for that matter.

The lack of commercial breaks added a great strain on the production personnel, a burden not experienced today. In live commercial broadcasts, the production crew uses the commercial breaks to catch its breath, correct any problems, and plan for the next section. The 1941 CBS-TV News was 15 straight minutes, with no chance for reflection, except live on the air.

Skedgell says he wasn't part of the decision to schedule two 15-minute newscasts each day. He just had to make sure they got done. So he doesn't know why CBS-TV gave so much time to news in the pre-war era. More than likely the decision involved the radio news format of that era as well as the FCC programming demands for television. While 30 minutes of live daily news didn't become the standard for American network television until the 1960s, that amount of news on radio was fairly common in 1941. As a copy boy, Skedgell had been involved in CBS Radio news and was used to newscasts which could run anywhere from a few headlines to 15 minutes, scheduled throughout the day. Ignoring the added complications of the visual medium, 15 minutes twice a day didn't look so imposing when compared to the network radio news schedule.

Plus, the FCC demanded that stations offer at least 15 hours of programming a week. Since Skedgell had been assigned to television duty before the FCC fixed its minimum hours, CBS had already decided to offer television news before the number of programming hours had been fixed. So scheduling news for two 15-minute programs daily freed up the rest of the programming staff from worrying about how to fill those two-and-a-half-hours a week.

Why Do News?

An obvious, but important question is why CBS chose to put news on television in the first place. The medium was still new and untested. The FCC didn't specifically require stations to offer news as part of the programming lineup. Profit couldn't have been a big motive since network television news didn't start to bring in more money than it spent until *60 Minutes* became one of the most popular shows on the air in the early 1970s. Plus, CBS couldn't even run commercials during this period.

WCBW-TV scheduled news not for one specific reason, but because of a variety of factors including pressure from government, the recent success of that format on radio, as a reflection of the culture of the company and as a natural progression from existing media.

Government Pressure

The FCC might not have specifically demanded news programming on television stations, but the owners felt the pressure just the same. The established radio networks, NBC and CBS, knew the FCC expectations on programming since they had been dealing with the government agency and its predecessor, the FRC, for more than a decade. One of the cornerstone provisions of the Communications Act of 1934 was the idea of operating in the "public interest, convenience, or necessity." Under this premise, radio station owners were using airwaves owned by the people. The Federal Radio Commission had originally been formed because early radio station operators complained that people couldn't hear their signal because of interference from other stations located too close on the radio wave spectrum. So broadcast station owners asked the government to come in and regulate the airwaves to protect their investments. As a result, the government limited the number of stations that could operate to keep radio signals from canceling each other out.

But in return for the right to use the limited airspace, the station owner had to offer more than just entertainment programming. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, before radio newscasts became popular, public interest programming involved political speeches, discussion programs, and live broadcasts of community events. Since the stations had to re-apply for their broadcast stations on a regular basis, they had to continually prove to the FCC that they were offering a substantial amount of news or public affairs programming. Since the public affairs shows usually had smaller audiences, they often couldn't attract commercial sponsors. Therefore, each station and network made clear to the FCC how many unsponsored, or sustaining, programs it offered on a regular basis.

NBC, CBS, and many individual stations made enough money during the 1930s to justify this arrangement. They would take some of the profits from the successful, and sponsored, entertainment programs and put that money into the public affairs programming. The networks and station owners saw the expense as an investment to make sure they wouldn't lose that highly-profitable radio license.[133] Plus, some station owners may have also felt an actual obligation to provide political and community information to their listeners.

The language that ruled radio found its way into television regulation as well. While the broadcast transmission standards and competing television systems received the headlines, the FCC rules on television also included a reminder of the premise of limited airspace: "That public interest, convenience or necessity will be served through the operation of the proposed station."[134]

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[133]Under the Communications Act of 1934, the government couldn't directly regulate the networks. Instead, the FCC had to put the pressure on the individual stations, which in turn got the attention of the networks.

[134]FCC Report, Docket 5806, 29 February 1940; Television History 1939-1940; TV: Assignments: History; (FCC-HD).

The networks understood the meaning of the phrase. So when CBS filed its license renewal report to the FCC after the start of commercial television, the company positioned "NEWS—15 minutes every afternoon, 15 minutes every evening, Monday through Friday"[135] at the top of its list of programming for the previous year.

Plus, in 1941, government scrutiny of broadcasting practices was intense. James Lawrence Fly had become chairman the previous fall and he was shaking up the industry. As CBS raced to get its television station ready that spring, Paley, Sarnoff, and other industry leaders waged a bitter fight with Fly over the future of radio networks. When defending the work of the networks, Paley often used news as an example during that battle. He threatened the end of "Columbia's world news service" if the stations faced tougher regulations.[136]

News Success on Radio

The image of news and public affairs programming as a necessary, but less popular, programming choice on radio changed dramatically with the rise of Adolph Hitler. As Hitler amassed his power in Germany and started to invade other countries in the late 1930s, people in this country wanted the freshest information possible. Even though the technology was crude and often didn't work, listeners started hearing people like CBS's Murrow and NBC's Fred Bates reporting live from far away places. The wire service reporters could get information back to the States to be read by radio announcers and commentators much faster than the next edition of the newspaper. Plus, the war in Europe provided a lot of news, at all times of the day and night.

The radio networks responded by adding more news programs to the lineup. As audiences grew for that information, even more newscasts were added at various times of

[135]"Supplemental Report of Television Program Activities, November 15, 1941 to November 15, 1942" Columbia Broadcasting System; WCBS 1/23/43-12/13/46; (FCC-DB).

[136]"What the New Radio Rules Mean," *Variety,* 21 May 1941, 24.

the day. A look at a five-year trend of evening radio programming on all networks leading up to 1941 shows a dramatic increase in the number of newscasts and news commentator programs.

Increase in Evening Radio Network News Programming, 1936-1941

	1936-37		1937-38		1938-39		1939-40		1940-41	
	#	(Hours)	#	(Hours)	#	(Hours)	#	(Hours)	#	(Hours)
News & News Commentators	**3**	(61)	**7**	(189)	**10**	(218)	**22**	(401)	**37**	(686)

Only three such programs could be heard during the 1936-37 season. Five years later, 37 programs were devoted to news or news commentators. The number of evening hours of news and news commentators increased by tenfold, jumping from 61 hours in 1936-37 to 686 hours in the season ending in the spring of 1941. The news pushed out variety shows, popular music programs, and talk formats, which all lost favor during the same period.[137]

CBS News Culture

It's not a coincidence that CBS's fortunes rose during the same period as news became a more popular format in radio. Paley had been trying to distinguish his operation from the larger, more established NBC Red and Blue networks since he took over the company in 1928. The war in Europe gave CBS that edge. By the spring of 1941, the CBS News war correspondents were already well-known broadcasters and honored journalists. Murrow and Shirer finished first and second in the 1940 *Overseas*

[137]"Night Show Costs Down," *Variety,* 28 May 1941, 23.

Press Club award for radio news reporting of World War II. In 1941, Shirer's *Berlin Diary* was one of the best-selling books in this country.[138]

But the impact of the Murrow Boys went beyond just recognition for the network and more listeners. Paley enjoyed spending time with Murrow and the others and listening to stories of their exploits in Europe. A simplified distinction used to contrast the leaders of the two main U.S. radio networks was that David Sarnoff's ego was wrapped up in Arturo Toscanini and the *NBC Symphony Orchestra* while Paley identified best with his News Department.

As the war heated up in Europe and the signs became more ominous that the United States might get involved in the conflict, Paley understood the power of his radio network. In March 1941, just months before the start of commercial television, Paley started out his annual stockholder's report with a homily on the importance of public service:

> As the blight of war spread from country to country, destroying life and freedom and economic values on an unprecedented scale, radio broadcasting helped our own people to become intelligently aware of the reality of world events. It gave an impressive demonstration of service and showed its versatility as an essential component of the American democratic way of life and as an importantly useful factor in preserving that way of life.[139]

While his essay may have been aimed as much at the FCC and Congress as the stockholders, Paley had built an impressive news operation. Since CBS had made its name in news on radio, it was only natural to feature news prominently on the untested new medium of television.

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[138] Columbia Broadcasting System, *1940 Annual Report*, 31 March 1941; (CBS-RL).
[139] CBS ,*1940 Annual Report*, (CBS-RL).

Influence of Other Media

A new medium isn't born fully-formed with a clear mission and purpose. Instead, the first people involved have to struggle with various formats to find what programming and information fits the particular strengths and weaknesses of the new medium. Carolyn Marvin studied the pre-history of mass media in the late 19th century. She looked at the original ideas on how the public would use electricity, telephones, telegraphy and the electric light. She concluded the medium itself didn't determine its use, but that it was a negotiation of known technologies: "New practices do not so much flow directly from technologies that inspire them as they are improvised out of old practices that no longer work in new settings."[140] Gilbert Seldes had roughly the same idea with his "Errors in Television" essay. He had watched both movies and radio first pull in their audiences by adapting formats from established entertainment sources. Seldes saw the downside of this practice because he believed both movies and radio settled for a low-brow audience instead of experimenting with a higher form of art for their respective media.

Even though television pioneers had been struggling with video programming since the 1920s, there were never enough television sets out in the public to get an accurate idea of what was working and what didn't. Seldes counted on the novelty effect of television to keep the audience entertained in the beginning, but he hoped to have the major "errors" corrected before the novelty wore off and people expected compelling content. So television just followed its predecessors by mimicking programming from other media as it started to find its own way.

Looking to radio for television answers was a natural result. Both of the first two television stations on the air July 1st with scheduled programming were owned by radio networks. As has been already discussed, since news had become such a popular radio

[140]Marvin, 5.

format, and CBS had particularly benefited from the interest in news, adapting news for the visual medium was an easy decision.

Another major influence on television was the movie industry. While people normally went to the movies for entertainment, the newsreel was always part of the admission price. All of the major studios had their own newsreel service and provided different packages twice a week. Many in this country saw their first moving images of people such as Franklin Roosevelt, Charles Lindbergh, and Adolph Hitler by watching *Fox Movietone News, Paramount News, Pathe News,* and other newsreels. The newsreels fit in between the cartoons and the main attraction at their local movie theater.

But in some cities and in some eras, the newsreels could stand on their own. The Embassy Theater in New York opened in 1929 and operated as a newsreel-only theater for many years. People could pay a quarter and watch a 45-minute program featuring the best of the different newsreel companies. Some of the largest crowds came to watch the film version of the fireside chats to either cheer or boo FDR and his New Deal programs.

In 1939, the *Telenews* Theater opened in San Francisco just in time to show Germany's invasion of Poland. *Telenews* was so successful that it expanded to 13 other cities over the next 20 years. At first the company purchased all its material from other newsreel operations. Later, *Telenews* formed its own production unit, which incidentally played a major role in the development of CBS television news in the late 1940s and early 1950s.[141]

If people were willing to pay money to see visual news, television certainly had a chance to bring in an audience by including a news program as part of the broadcast schedule.

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[141]Fielding, 200-202.

As a result of the combination of government influence, the popularity of war news on the radio, CBS's reputation for war coverage, and the example of successful news programs on other media, WCBW had ample reason to schedule two newscasts a day from the beginning of commercial television.

News Set Design/Content

Most television news sets are designed with the random nature of news stories in mind. The anchors normally sit at a desk or stand with a background of colors, graphic, and maybe the station or network logo. Sometime the skyline of a city will be shown or some other symbol of the area. The set and background are neutral on purpose. The news changes every day so the set shouldn't be sending a message about content that doesn't match the news of that day.

But when you looked at the set for the CBS-TV News in 1941, you knew exactly what kind of stories would be emphasized. The design of the background, the positions of the camera, and the art work all made it clear this newscast would be devoted to World War II. In fact, the set didn't really offer a neutral location for presenting any non-war news without the viewer getting some visual reminder of the conflict. Therefore, the discussion of set design and content are largely intertwined.

News Set

At first glance, the 1941 CBS-TV news set looks like a big geography lesson. Huge maps take up most of the background of the set, especially in the areas that viewers would see at home. The next impression is that the massive equipment needed to broadcast the newscast appear to be crowding in on Richard Hubbell, pushing him right up against the back flats of the set. Cameras, camera crews, a microphone dangling from

a large stick, and bright lights are right on top of him as he tries to ignore the close proximity and read the news.

The news set was built in the back of the cavernous Grand Central Terminal Studio, between the sets of other programs presented during those early months. Since Grand Central was touted as the largest studio in the world, the cramped conditions on the news set weren't because of a lack of space. The equipment had to be that close because of the primitive nature of the early system.

Most television stations in this era were using the iconoscope cameras invented by Vladimir Zworykin of RCA. The iconoscope camera was definitely a major breakthrough in 1936 when RCA unveiled its first all-electronic system. But still, both the iconoscope camera tube, as well as Farnsworth's image dissector tube which was also used in some cameras, needed a lot of light to "see" the picture. So the production crew had to hang a number of very bright studio lights right above the news set, shining right down on Hubbell and the background. Other lights were positioned at eye-level, shooting right in his eyes as he spoke. Even by positioning the lights on different sides of the set, the intensity caused harsh shadows on one side of his face while his body cast a strong shadow on the wall behind him. The lights were not only bright, but very hot as well. People who appeared on early television would start perspiring almost immediately after the lights were turned on and often their clothing was soaked with sweat by the end of the broadcast.

But people watching the CBS-TV news in 1941 would have been drawn not just to Hubbell, but to what was going on behind him. He stood just inches in front of massive maps of various locations in Europe and Asia. These maps were the main advantage over radio that the television crew could provide in this stage of television development.

The entire set was designed around these maps. The background consisted of three flats, each roughly ten feet in height and four feet across. The center panel was perpendicular to the camera and the side panels went out at slight angles, like wings. All three panels included a large map, roughly three feet by four feet. To allow for showing more than three places in one newscast, the panels had maps on both sides. "Each map bay would swing on an axis," said Skedgell, showing larger geographical regions on the front panel "…the Russian front, the Middle East, or the Asian front, and in the back would be close ups of particular battle area, and Hubbell would swing the panel around."[142] The maps didn't just include city names and national borders. They were filled with silhouettes of tanks, planes, and ships to represent troop strength. Thick lines and arrows showed battle fronts as well as advancing and retreating troops.

The massive news desks or podiums of today's television news were nowhere to be found on the CBS set. There was a small table with narrow, flimsy legs positioned between Hubbell and the cameras. The table didn't even come with a chair so it was mostly used to hold equipment and props needed for the newscast.

CBS typically used two cameras in the production of the newscast but often had to work with just one. Bob Bendick and Eddie Anhalt normally ran the cameras with Rudy Bretz helping out as well. At least one of the cameras would be at roughly Hubbell's eye-level, shooting the announcer and the map behind him. The crew could also use a dolly camera which was mounted on a movable cart. The dolly camera could be raised, lowered, moved in or out, depending on the necessary shot. For the viewer, one of the cameras normally featured Hubbell and the other had a closer shot of the map being discussed.

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[142]Skedgell interview, (RS-OH2).

To record Hubbell's voice, a microphone was hung over his head from a 20 foot pole which was operated by a crew member off to the side of the cameras. The boom operator would move the microphone as Hubbell moved from map to map on the set. The microphone had to be low enough to pick up his voice but high enough to stay out of the camera shot. Another person, known as the floor director, stayed next to one of the cameras and used hand signals to let Hubbell know when he needed to look into another camera or to slow down or hurry up his presentation.

Above the news set and off to the side was the television control room, which is the central location for all of the programming. In the control room, the director is in charge of picking camera shots and knowing when to change scenes. Worthington Miner was in charge of television production and directed most of the entertainment programming. He directed the newscasts in the early months of WCBW, but then delegated those shows to other directors. Also in the control room were an assistant director, an audio engineer, a switcher who listened for the director's cues on when to change cameras, and a secretary who was in charge of keeping the log for the FCC.

Another position in the control room was unique to the iconoscope camera. That camera had a hard time distinguishing between different light levels in the picture. So one of the jobs during a live broadcast was to adjust or "shade" the camera picture before the director took that shot on the air. Long-time CBS cameraman Larry Racies got his start in television as a "shader." "You had to shade and balance out the picture," remembers Racies, "and you used the video image on the scope to aid in your shading."[143] When the technology improved, the job of the shader disappeared.[144]

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[143]Larry Racies, interview by author. 12 August 2003, New York City, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (LR-OH2).

[144]Description of news set and operation from "The Promise of Television," *Fortune*, August 1943, 140; CBS, "Supplemental Report of Television Program Activities;" WCBS 1/23/43-12/13/46;

Content: War News

A newsman like Bob Skedgell didn't need a specially-constructed set to let him know what stories to cover in 1941. "I mean that was the big news," reflected Skedgell on war coverage. He estimates that ninety percent of the news he wrote for those newscasts involved World War II. Since Skedgell wrote all the stories in every newscast, he had control over what stories would appear on the air. Skedgell's approach to picking stories for the newscast, writing the copy, and even adjusting his style for the new format hint at issues that continue to haunt television news to this day.

The widening war in Europe and its implications back here in the states had been the biggest news story for some time. Paris had fallen to the Germans the previous June. The Nazis had been bombing London for most of the year. The attacks had transformed the people of England, with Americans experiencing the horror through the news coverage and commentary by reporters such as Murrow:

> The things cast down by the Germans out of the night skies have made hundreds of thousands of people homeless. I've seen them standing cruel cold of a winter morning with tears frozen on their faces looking at the little pile of rubble that was their home and saying over and over again in a toneless, unbelieving way, "what have we done to deserve this?"[145]

At the same time, Hitler was busy taking over Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece and other countries. People in the United States were very interested in the war and the increase in radio news programs over the previous five years reflected that demand for news.

Just eight days before CBS-TV went on the air, Hitler unleashed Operation Barbarrosa, an attack on Russia. In the days leading up to the first television broadcast, the Germans stormed across the Soviet Union while Winston Churchill pledged to

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(FCC-DB); Robert J. Landry, "Take-It-Easy Television," *Variety,* 9 July 1941, 3; Racies, Skedgell, and Bendick interviews, (LR-OH2)(RS-OH1/2)(RB-OH2).

[145]Edward R. Murrow, *In Search of Light: The Broadcasts of Edward R. Murrow 1938-1961*, ed. Edward Bliss Jr. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 44.

support the USSR, previously a fierce enemy of Great Britain. By this time, the war was being waged on so many fronts; the six rotating maps of CBS-TV news may have seemed insufficient to explain all of the strategic locations.

The very day that WCBW and WNBT went on the air, the German army was pushing across the Soviet Union with the plan of taking Moscow. The Nazis had already captured Minsk and were heading east from that city. Germans had also taken over the Latvian capital of Riga. With the Germans concentrating on the eastern front, The British air force attacked Bremen, Kiel, and other locations on the European continent. In this country, Secretary of Navy Frank Knox announced at a Governor's conference that the Americans should attack the Nazis now, while the Germans were concentrating on the Russian offensive. "We can insure, beyond a shadow of a doubt, the defeat of that pagan force," said Knox, "and insure a victory for a Christian civilization." President Roosevelt said he still hoped the United States could stay out of the war although he wasn't confident that would be possible. Also on July 1st, 1941, every male over 21 years of age had to register for the draft.[146]

In this time of international war and the accompanied tension at home, picking war stories nine out of ten times for the WCBW newscast reflected the climate of the country. Even constructing a news set specifically to explain the various war locations was a legitimate response to the news of the day.

Content: Non-War News

Since the news set had been constructed with war news in mind, Skedgell and the production crew had to make adjustments when including other news. Skedgell claims he never let the set determine the content, but at the same time he admits he limited the amount of information when the stories couldn't be shown visually.

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[146]July 1st news from various page one stories in *New York Times*, 1& 2, July 1941.

First and foremost, Skedgell reflected his training with the respected CBS News crew on the 17th Floor at 485 Madison. He had learned how to stack a newscast with the most important stories first, followed by other stories in descending order of importance. He wasn't going to alter that formula just because of the new medium. So if he felt a story was important, it made the newscast, even if the story couldn't be explained with a map. "You reported it because it was a show of record in a sense," said Skedgell, "you weren't going to ignore it--you couldn't." [147]

But the production crew had to figure out how to show Hubbell on the air reading a non-war story when he was surrounded by large war maps. The best the crew could do was to have Hubbell sit on the edge of the small desk when he had to present non-war news. He never sat behind the desk, but he would sit on the corner of it and read from his script. The script presented a problem. The TelePrompTer, which allows news readers to look into the camera and follow their script which is scrolling right in front of the camera but invisible to the viewer, wouldn't be invented for another decade.

So Richard Hubbell read the entire newscast from a script he held in his left hand. On war stories, the director could cut away from Hubbell and his script and show the war maps. But on non-war stories, the viewer watched him read from a piece of paper. The information might be important, but the presentation was awkward. So even though Skedgell said he never let the format determine the content, he admitted he kept the non-war stories short, "collapsed into a short paragraph or two as much as you could,"[148] so Hubbell wouldn't be forced to sit on the edge of the desk and read from the script on camera for long periods of time.

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[147]Skedgell interview, (RS-OH2)
[148]Ibid.

The new television writer soon found that he was adapting much of his copy to fit the new medium. Skedgell was one of the first journalists to start negotiating the differences in writing styles that would differentiate television from radio. During the previous decade, radio broadcasters had started to make the transition from the traditional print style of news. News broadcasters and announcers found they couldn't read the long, fact-filled sentences common in newspapers and on the news wires. So they started experimenting with shorter sentences and more conversational language. Skedgell had been learning the nuances of broadcast news writing since he started at CBS in 1939. But now, not even two years into his training, he had to confront a different form of broadcasting.

Radio announcers could create the illusion of spontaneity because the listener couldn't see the stack of script pages. That illusion was broken on television as Hubbell held up his script and read directly from the page. "We realized we had to come up with a new form of the written word," said Skedgell. "Sentences had to be much more terse, less wordy and so forth—you learn by necessity."[149] He also became more aware of the maps, and altered his news copy to allow the production crew to show the geographic area involved in the story.

Wire Service Influence

During those first few weeks, almost all of those stories chosen for the WCBW newscast, war and non-war news, came from one source: United Press. The wire service had almost complete control over the stories that would be shown on WCBW each day. The wire service had so much power for two reasons. First, Skedgell was following the lead of his mentors in CBS Radio news and secondly, he had few other resources.

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[149]Ibid.

As copy boy at CBS Radio, one of Skedgell's main tasks was making sure the wire service machines kept running and that they always had enough paper to keep typing out the news from around the world. What he learned from his mentors was how to look at the wire stories and determine their newsworthiness. He learned how to choose a lead story and all the topics that came after that in the newscast. At the same time, he was learning how to adapt the wire service writing style for the audio medium. CBS News might be remembered for the live reports from Europe during the war. But in this country, much of the news didn't come from reporters live on the scene, but instead from wire service stories rewritten by CBS News personnel.

In television, all Skedgell had in the "newsroom" at Grand Central Terminal was one wire machine. There were no reporters for television. CBS Radio might have had an impressive team of writers and editors, but they never came down to the television studio. Edward R. Murrow couldn't appear live on television. First of all, the technology didn't exist to bring a video signal from Europe to the United States, and secondly, Murrow was much too busy with his radio reports to have anything to do with television.

So WCBW's sole news writer chose almost all of his news from the only source available—the UP Radio wire, which had been installed in the television studio. That's not to say he wasn't versed in the news. Like all good newsmen, Skedgell read the *New York Times* and other papers every day. But ethical journalists wouldn't just take information out of a newspaper. The facts would have to be confirmed, the story would have to be independently verified. Skedgell didn't have anyone to help him check out stories. But since CBS paid for the wire service, he could use those stories without any independent confirmation. Because of the availability of the wire service and the lack of

any other news gathering resources, Skedgell says "practically all" stories on WCBW news came from the wire service.[150]

Typical Working Day

The delineation of duties between Skedgell and Hubbell matched both their experiences and the separation between the radio and television divisions of CBS. Skedgell spent most of his time worrying about choosing the stories and writing the copy while Hubbell worked on visualizing those stories and preparing his on-air presentation.

Normally, Skedgell arrived at the television newsroom at Grand Central Terminal between nine-thirty and ten o'clock in the morning. He would spend the next hour or so ripping the wire copy from the UP machine in the office. Skedgell struggled with story order and potential angles he could take when writing the copy. Hubbell normally came in between 11:00 A.M. and noon. The two men would talk about the potential stories and come up with a preliminary rundown. Then they would start thinking about how those stories could be visualized on the air. Skedgell admits he didn't get too heavily involved in that part of the production. At the same time, he said Hubbell never got involved in any of the writing.

For the next few hours, Skedgell would concentrate on writing the stories for the first newscast at 2:30 P.M. A fifteen minute newscast with no commercials needed a lot of news so Skedgell had to write at a fairly quick pace to come up with enough material for the program. Meanwhile, Hubbell spent his time working with the television crew on various ways to illustrate the stories during the newscast.

For Skedgell, the solitary wire machine at Grand Central wasn't adequate for giving him enough stories, enough information, and enough perspective on the news. He was used to the variety of sources and the guidance in the radio newsroom. So after a

[150]wire service reliance at WCBW from Skedgell interviews, (RS-OH1/2).

few weeks of relying on the UP machine, he decided to take it upon himself to widen his news perspective. He would still start his day at Grand Central and decide on a rundown with Hubbell in the late morning. But then Skedgell would walk over to CBS headquarters at 485 Madison Avenue. He returned to the 17th floor newsroom where he wasn't just limited to one wire machine, but he could combine the best of UP, AP, the International News Service, and Reuters. Just as important, he could once again rely on the more experienced writers and editors of CBS radio news. From then on, Skedgell spent most of his time in the radio newsroom writing his stories and having others in the newsroom edit his copy.

People on the street in midtown Manhattan probably didn't think twice about the young man hurrying down the block with a stack of papers in his hand. Skedgell said he would wait until about a half-hour before the newscast before he would make the ten-block walk back to the Grand Central Terminal studio with the script for the newscast.

Meanwhile, Hubbell and the crew had worked out the visual look of the newscast during the previous few hours. Skedgell would hand Hubbell the script and then they'd make any last minute changes before the newscast began. Because of the need to determine maps and camera shots in advance, Skedgell said it was much harder in television than radio to make serious changes to the rundown in the hours leading up to the broadcast.

During the newscast, Skedgell would follow along the script while Hubbell was reading the stories on the air. He would periodically leave the set and run back to the UP machine to see if any big stories had come across the wire. But the writer had no specific duties during the newscast itself. Skedgell stayed in the shadows behind the cameras or in the control room area in case he was needed for an emergency.

After the first newscast, he would take a dinner break and then head back to the television newsroom and start to work on the 8:00 P.M. newscast. Depending on how much happened in the world between 2:45 P.M. and 8:00 P.M., the second newscast could be very similar to the first or it could be dramatically different. The period between newscasts in New York coincided with late evening and early morning in Europe which reduced the chance of fresh war news for the evening newscast. The newscast "doesn't always change drastically," said Skedgell, "but sometimes it does, and you had to be alert—to be ready for it." After the second newscast, the television crew immediately raced the cameras across the studio to the next set needed in the evening of live programming. But for Skedgell, his day was over and around 8:30 in the evening, after a ten-to-twelve hour day, he could head home.[151]

VISUALIZING THE NEWS

The 1941 WCBW-TV newscasts are significant because of an interesting mix of the ambition and vision of the television crew countered with the glaring lack of technology, even by pre-war standards. The core television personnel had been able to freely experiment with camera shots, lighting and film techniques over the previous few years. Prior to July 1st, they weren't shackled to a definite program schedule as were their competitors over at NBC. The CBS Television Program Department could spend hours, just testing different styles of lights or distances between the camera and the subject.

So when it came time to design a news program for television, the CBS crew may have had grand ideas on how to visualize a radio broadcast. But the resources needed to offer a visual variety just couldn't be found in the Grand Central Terminal studios that

[151]Skedgell interviews, (RS-OH1/2).

summer. This dearth of technology didn't just affect the newscast, but all programs on the CBS lineup.

No Live Remote Equipment

Over at NBC, WNBT spent a significant amount of its broadcast week presenting live programming from around New York City. The station kicked off its commercial service with a professional baseball game and spent the next few days of the first week at a tennis tournament over in Jackson Heights. Live broadcasting certainly wasn't easy. Each broadcast required many hours of preparation as well as the massive truck needed to haul around the necessary equipment. But NBC wasn't breaking any new ground with these programs. RCA had been working on mobile units as far back as 1937, and they played a big role in the World's Fair broadcasts of 1939.

Still, CBS didn't own a mobile unit. It's not that the company was too cheap to invest in the technology. But once again, the network was forced to buy its equipment from its chief competitor. CBS ordered a mobile unit from RCA back in 1940, but it had never been delivered. So while WNBT could take its equipment to Ebbets Field, WCBW was forced to bring the sports contests to its studios. NBC viewers saw the Dodgers while CBS viewers watched a rousing game of badminton.

A mobile camera system could have provided a dramatic element for WCBW-TV news. Today we take for granted seeing the reporter live on the scene of a story. But in 1941, having the opportunity to take the viewer live to a story would have been a dramatic improvement over a studio-bound program. As we shall see though, even when CBS did get its mobile equipment in later years, it was almost never available for daily news use.

Another great resource NBC had over CBS was the ability to switch live to other cities. The previous summer, NBC, Philco and General Electric had been able to tap into

an experimental coaxial cable line to provide live coverage of the Republican National Convention to viewers in Philadelphia, New York City, and Schenectady. CBS didn't have any similar arrangements. Therefore, if WCBW wanted to show something live in 1941, that something either had to be in the Grand Central Terminal studio or visible out the window.

Other Limitations

Two other elements which were commonly utilized by either CBS television or radio were also kept out of the newscast. Since the idea of presenting 15 hours of live programming each week was daunting for the television stations, the FCC allowed the stations to also run films. These films might be old Hollywood movies, documentaries, or instructional films. But for whatever reason, films were never used in the newscast. While the cost of contracting with a newsreel company to provide newsfilm might have been prohibitive, there were several other sources for filmed material. But that element was not utilized during the 1941 newscasts.

The television crew also never used a live report from a radio reporter in a newscast. That technology certainly was in heavy use over on the radio side. The CBS World News Roundup consisted of live reports from around the world. But none of those famous radio correspondents appeared on WCBW-TV news that year, certainly not live from the battle fronts.

Creating a New Format For News

Even with all these limitations, CBS still insisted on forging ahead with two television newscasts daily. The network could have taken the easy way out and just trained a camera on a radio announcer as he read his newscast which was already being beamed out across the radio network. That's what NBC did. Even with the most

advanced technology in the industry, NBC's first television news offering of the commercial era was a simulcast of Lowell Thomas' popular radio broadcast. The only allowance for the camera came from the advertiser, and not the network. Somebody stacked up a bunch of Sunoco oil cans in the studio in deference to the radio sponsor. *Variety* didn't give the station much credit for creativity: "There is nothing very glamorous about these cans or about men reading either news digests or commercials from scripts."[152]

For better or worse, CBS didn't rely on a famous radio person to deliver its visual news. The television crew was left to create its own news identity. With the absence of more sophisticated technology, that identity became the visualization of war news via maps.

Using Visual Resources

So while Skedgell spent most of his time on story order and sentence structure, Hubbell and his fellow television "brain trusters" worked on the maps. Most of the maps themselves were drawn by Johnny Rupe, the same person shown on that first broadcast illustrating "Jack and the Beanstalk." Since the war had been limited mostly to Europe and the Soviet Union that year, most of the maps could be used night after night. The position of the battle lines, tanks, and arrows would be changed to reflect the latest war news. Rudy Bretz was also heavily involved in whatever graphics could be created on short notice. He fashioned silhouettes of tanks, boats and planes to signify advancing and retreating troops. A Nazi symbol or a hammer and sickle along with thick lines and arrows let the viewer know what nation had the momentum on the eastern front.

The crew took a page out of a Hollywood guide to shot sequencing when designing the three rotating map panels on the set. The front side always had a wide view

[152]"Lowell Thomas," *Variety,* 9 July 1941, 30.

of the battle front, much like a long shot, or establishing shot, in film language. When Hubbell would rotate the map, a closer view of the particular day's fighting would be visible. This would compare to a close-up in film editing. To make sure the viewer, and cameraman, could follow the action, Hubbell often used a pointer when he was discussing a certain location.

Pointing to maps on television may seem quite obvious and elementary now, but at the time that approach created a niche. People could certainly see maps in the newspaper or even in the classroom, but television provided the opportunity for the latest look at war developments. For CBS, the maps provided the main distinction television news could offer as compared to radio.

Sometimes, the crew also used photographs from the wire service. Even though these were still pictures, they were often seen as up-to-the minute visuals to help give the newscast a look of immediacy. The photos would be mounted on an easel and one of the cameras would focus on the picture and the director would take the shot of the photo at the appropriate time in the script. Skedgell says still photographs weren't used very often, but he's not sure why they didn't rely on this visual element more often in the newscast.

The crew also on occasion used props to visualize a story. "If there's a gun that the army said was a great new weapon or something," said Bendick, "we'd have one of those. If there was a new headlight on a car, we'd have that... If someone came up with a new pill, we'd have pills" on the newscast.[153]

For the most part though, the visual significance of those 1941 newscasts came down to the detail and effectiveness of the war maps. Interestingly, the use and

[153]Bendick interview, (RB-OH2).

understanding of maps would play a key role in the hiring of two of the most important news people in early post-war television news at CBS.

MANAGEMENT INVOLVEMENT

The management of CBS either had an incredible amount of trust in 21-year-old Robert Skedgell's news judgment and ability, or maybe the people in charge just had that little respect for the new medium. Either way, or a combination of both, CBS Television news in this era had a remarkable lack of oversight, especially on the editorial side.

Skedgell says he chose the stories and their order every day, for every newscast. He would consult with Richard Hubbell and some changes might be made for visual or technical reasons, but no one else was ever involved in story choice or order.

Under the CBS radio news system, a writer would always submit his or her copy to the editor on duty for approval. The announcer might also make changes in the copy as well. The editing system is how young desk assistants learned how to be broadcast news writers. The practice also worked as a checks and balance system against any fact errors or confusing copy.

When Skedgell spent his day at the Grand Central Terminal studio, he was the only journalist in the building. He couldn't show his copy to anyone with news experience. Remember that Skedgell had only been involved in news for fewer than two years himself at this point. With the absence of any experienced journalists, he would submit his copy to Program Director Gilbert Seldes. "Well, he was a great writer and great critic," remembers Skedgell, "and he certainly knew something about writing. So

he was helpful to that extent."[154] If Seldes was busy, Skedgell would run the stories by Adrian Murphy, the head of television for CBS.

One of the reasons Skedgell started spending much of his day in the CBS radio newsroom was to get back amongst the journalists. Once again, he could turn his copy over to the experienced editors of CBS News for their wisdom and guidance. Sometimes Paul White himself would go over the television script, just as if the words were to be read over the powerful radio network. But those occasions were few and only at Skedgell's prompting.

But even back amongst the experienced news people, no one worked with the young writer on his selection of stories or the order in which they ran in his newscast. "They checked the copy for accuracy and that sort of thing," said Skedgell, "but they didn't try to get into the act at all. They didn't want to as a matter of fact."[155] As a result, only one person, the least experienced writer at CBS News, had sole control over the selection and order of news stories on the WCBW-TV newscasts. The indifference from the radio news staff foreshadowed future relations between television and radio news people at CBS. In fact, Skedgell's insistence of having the radio editors go over his copy would turn out to be the closest radio and television news at CBS would work together on a daily basis for several years.

CBS: MIXED MESSAGES ON TELEVISION'S PRESENT AND FUTURE

In 1941, the Columbia Broadcasting System wasn't fighting to win the battle of commercial television. Instead, the company was just trying not to lose. CBS sent out confusing, mixed messages to the public about its role in television. On one hand,

[154]Skedgell interview, (RS-OH1).
[155]Skedgell interview, (RS-OH2).

Columbia was spending millions of dollars on the transmitting equipment and programming for CBS Television. The company issued boastful press releases about its powerful transmitter on the Chrysler Building and its "world's largest" television studio in the Grand Central Terminal. Plus, WCBW was one of only two television stations in the country ready to commit to 15 hours of programming when the commercial ban was lifted.

On the other hand, CBS fought harder than any other company to delay the start of commercial television. Plus, the company made it clear every day on the television station that the programming service could be cancelled at any time. To make the situation even worse, almost no one could watch WCBW-TV in 1941.

Television wasn't even the most important issue to Bill Paley in the summer of 1941. His attention was focused on possible government regulations which could blow apart the empire he had been building for more than ten years.

FCC Radio Network Fight

Television may have been the future in 1941, but radio was now. Radio had made Paley a very rich man and now he felt the FCC was threatening to take it all away. Once again, the nemesis was FCC Chairman James Lawrence Fly. The FCC had been conducting hearings into the power of NBC and CBS over the nation's radio stations and whether or not the situation could be considered a monopoly. For CBS, the problem was an "option clause" the network forced on all its affiliates. Under the clause, CBS could take over any time period it wanted on a local station. Therefore the network could accommodate the desires of the national sponsor without regard to the programming needs of the local stations. For NBC the stakes were even higher. The FCC wanted NBC to sell off either its Red or Blue network.

The government announced the sweeping changes for radio regulation in May 1941. Paley and Sarnoff spent the rest of the year attacking Fly and using all the political muscle they could marshal against the regulations. During the very period that commercial television began, the leaders of both networks were in constant negotiations with the FCC trying to come to some kind of agreement on a watered-down version of network-local station radio agreements.

The battle between the FCC and the radio networks moved to the courtroom and eventually made it all the way to the Supreme Court. In May 1943, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the FCC had the right to regulate the industry through the rules it proposed back in 1941. As a result of the court ruling, CBS had to eliminate the option clause in its contract with local stations. NBC was forced to sell one of its networks. Edward Noble was the winning bidder for the NBC Blue network. Noble, who came from the family that owned the Lifesaver candy company, turned the Blue network into the American Broadcasting Company.[156]

"Nobody Can Get CBS Television"

No one working in television in 1941 was there for the audience adulation. But the morale of the CBS Television crew had to sink just a bit when *Variety* ran a banner headline a little more than a month before the station's debut: "Shows Without Audiences: Nobody Can Get CBS Television." The headline was only a slight exaggeration. Some set owners would be able to see WCBW, but only if they went to the trouble to have their television sets adjusted. CBS was caught in a government

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[156] Monopoly hearing information from "MBS vs. RCA-NBC," *Newsweek,* 19 January 1942, 53; "Radio Licenses for the Press: Inquiry Stirs New FCC Storm," *Newsweek,* 4 August 1941, 42-43; "CBS in Point-By-Point Attack on FCC," and "What the New Radio Rules Mean," *Variety,* 21 May 1941, 24; "Public is Satisfied-Paley," *Variety,* 18 June 1941, 25; "MBS Files With FCC Own Formula To Solve Chain Broadcasting Tangle," *Variety,* 20 August 1941, 25; Barnouw, *The Golden Web,* 168-181; Paley, *As It Happened,* 195-199.

technology change. The FCC had adjusted the broadcast standards and gave CBS a revised Channel 2, which had previously been reserved for government use. Since most of the receivers had been designed and built before the change, those sets couldn't even receive Channel 2. So while other television pioneers were resigned to just hundreds or maybe thousands of viewers, people at CBS were certainly working mostly for pride. Worthington Miner said his wife used to laugh at him when he'd come home "full of piss and vinegar" complaining about some problem on a show that night. In reality, he estimated that maybe 150 people could see the WCBW signal. "It was," Miner recalled, "let's face it, a thoroughly meaningless exercise."[157]

CBS Color Television

WCBW-TV might not have even been CBS's most important television signal in 1941. While the majority of the television employees worked on the 15-hour weekly program schedule on Channel 2, the company was staking its television future more on an experimental television signal which also emanated from Grand Central Terminal that year. CBS felt it had a workable color television system and kept trying to convince the FCC to forget about black and white TV and instead approve the Columbia color plan.

CBS's Peter Goldmark had been working on various ways to improve RCA and Farnsworth television systems since he was hired in 1936. First, he concentrated on the quality of film shown over television. Then, in 1940, Goldmark stepped into a movie theater and the event changed the course of his research for decades. He watched his first color movie, *Gone with the Wind*, and called it a "uniquely exhilarating experience." He was so moved by the color that he took out a notebook in the intermission and started working on bringing color to television.[158] Various inventors had dabbled in color

[157] Miner, 159.
[158]Goldmark, 54-56.

television all the way back to the 1920s, but the industry seemed to be resigned to starting with a black and white signal and later working on color.

Just as the FCC television committee thought it might be close to coming to an agreement on television standards, Goldmark shook up the entire industry by announcing he had perfected color television. He submitted a confidential report to the FCC's National Television Systems Committee (NTSC) as early as September 1940 and had shown an experimental broadcast by December of that year. CBS then started lobbying the government that the public wouldn't be satisfied with black-and-white television and instead the FCC should go with the CBS color system as the standard.

Goldmark's system had a couple of major problems though. First of all, CBS color would make all existing television sets useless, a situation the FCC had been trying hard to avoid. Plus, Goldmark's system harkened back to mechanical television which had been discarded back in the 1930s. The inventor was quick to point out his system wasn't like the old "flying spot" disc operations. But the camera and receiver did have spinning color filter wheels which allowed for the black-and-white tubes to create and read the color.

CBS's main obstacle proved to be David Sarnoff at RCA, as usual. After years and millions of dollars of research, Sarnoff wasn't about to let CBS and its upstart inventor take the lead in the all-important fight for television system standards. RCA started a vigorous campaign to discredit the CBS color system as out-dated and archaic.

When the FCC released its report in May 1941, RCA prevailed. The government approved the black-and-white system for commercial television, but allowed CBS and other companies to continue experimenting with color television and submit their findings at the start of 1942. So every afternoon, in addition to the black-and-white offering on WCBW-TV, CBS also offered experimental color broadcasts on another

signal in an effort to win later FCC approval for its color system.[159] In later years, the fight over the Goldmark color system sparked a strong debate over whether or not CBS really believed in the technology or was just trying to slow down the growth of television itself.

Saving the Channel

CBS will always be remembered as one of only two stations ready for a 15-hour program schedule when commercial television began. But the distinction may have been less about leading the way in television and more about not losing its place at the table. The company wasn't shy about letting viewers know it felt pressured into providing the minimum amount of program service. In a pamphlet CBS offered to its viewers titled "A Statement of Some Television Facts," the company offered two reasons for starting television broadcasting in July 1941. First, Columbia wanted to be in the "forefront of new fields of broadcasting." But just as important, CBS felt that failure to meet the deadline, "might have forfeited our television broadcasting license." At that time, the FCC only had four stations assigned to New York City for commercial television, and if CBS lost Channel 2, it could have been shut out of future television in the nation's largest city.[160]

Because of its incompatible color system, the uncertainties of war-time production of television equipment and receivers, and the heavy cost of programming a

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[159]CBS color experiments information from "Commercial Television Given Nod By F.C.C.," *Variety,* 7 May 1941, 32; Goldmark, 54-65; CBS, "Description of CBS Color Television System;" National Television Systems Committee 1940 2 of 2; National TV Systems Committee; (FCC-HD); James Scofield O'Rourke IV, "The Development of Color Television: A Study in the Freemarket Process," *Journalism History* 9, nos. 3-4 (Autumn, Winter 1982), 78-85, 106-107; Smith, 274-275; Hubbell, *4000 Years,* 150-152; Thomas H. Hutchinson, *Here Is Television: Your Window To the World,* rev. ed. (New York: Hastings House, 1950), 326-327; Kisseloff, 72-75; Fisher and Fisher, 305-308.

[160]Columbia Broadcasting System, "A Statement of Some Television Facts," August 1941; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL).

channel few people could see, WCBW started each broadcast day with this less-than-optimistic view of 1941 commercial television:

> We hope you enjoy our programs. The Columbia Broadcasting System however is not engaged in the manufacture of television receiving sets and does not want you to consider these broadcasts as inducements to purchase television sets at this time. Because of a number of conditions which are not within our control, we cannot foresee how long this television broadcasting schedule will continue.[161]

But the company couldn't resist a little bragging on WCBW-TV. CBS took the unusual step of warning viewers about television's uncertain future since it was worried its very television programming would "please you well enough in fact to make you want to have your own television set."[162]

WCBW-TV: "TAKE IT EASY TELEVISION."

CBS might have been constantly threatening to pull its programming, but WCBW-TV continued to offer 15 hours of television information and entertainment through the rest of 1941 and beyond. Even though the station was hampered by a signal most would never see, the people who did watch WCBW noticed the effort.

NBC had many more years and program hours of experience in television, but the experimentation by the CBS Television Programming Department prior to July 1941 allowed the new station to attempt some fresh approaches to visual programming. Critics noticed almost immediately. *Variety* dubbed the CBS efforts as "Take-It Easy Television" when comparing the programming with NBC. For the reviewer, WNBT seemed formal while WCBW appeared more informal. "NBC skypictures give the impression that the engineer runs the works. CBS already suggest that the CBS runs the

[161]CBS, "A Statement of Some Television Facts."
[162]Ibid.

engineers. This is the difference between treating television as a science only and treating it as an art exploiting a science."[163]

CBS didn't mind letting the viewers see the process of television as it happened. The directors weren't above taking a shot of another camera as it moved into position for the next shot. The entertainment programming had the feel of a rehearsal and the performers were ready to respond to the kinds of problems that were inherent in live television. Even when WCBW presented a program as basic as a vaudeville show, the casual approach was noticeable to critics. The performers and the production crew still made mistakes as was expected in this early era of television, but *Variety* noted "that off-the-elbow manner of presentation provides an informal, relaxed, leisurely and intimate show."[164] Critics also may have been partial to WCBW since the main director, Worthington Miner, came from a theater background.

CBS had also taken a chance on new fluorescent lighting from General Electric for its studio. A bank of these lights above the various sets allowed the cameras and performers more freedom of movement which in turn provided a more natural feel to the presentation. Plus, the fluorescent lights cut down the heat and intensity of light on the people in front of the camera which in turn helped them feel more comfortable while performing. Those experimental lights though did have one drawback. Bendick remembers that water was pumped through the lights to keep them from overheating. But those water-cooled lights would start to leak at the worst times. "So in the middle of a news program or any program" said Bendick, "you'd see the commentator move a little left or right, because the droplets were coming down…and it was very disruptive on the most serious of occasions." [165]

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[163]Landry, "Take-It-Easy Television.".
[164]"Vaudeville Show," *Variety,* 6 August 1941, 35.
[165]Bendick interview, (RB-OH2).

CBS's television crew continued to crank out the programs throughout the summer and fall of 1941. Here's a sample week of programming on WCBW-TV:

WCBW-TV Programming Schedule, November 24-29, 1941

Monday:	2:00	Test pattern
	2:30	News
	2:45	The Boys in the Back Room (discussion of television)
	3:15	Children's Story – A Voyage to Brobdingnag
	3:30	Afternoon sign off
	7:30	Test pattern
	8:00	News
	8:15	Joan Edwards –songs
	8:30	Men at Work (guests: Hank Henry & Bob Alda, comics, Chinese Dogs; dancers, June Winters, singer, etc.)
	9:30	Sign-off[166]
Tuesday	2:30	News
	2:45	Dance Lesson
	3:15	Children's Story – A Voyage to Brobdingnag
	8:00	News
	8:15	Tamara -songs
	8:30	Metropolitan Museum of Art: Homes in the Machine Age
	9:00	Bob Edge – Personalities in Sport
Wednesday	2:30	News
	2:45	Table Talk
	3:15	Children's Story –A Voyage to Brobdingnag
	8:00	News
	8:15	Joan Edwards –songs
	8:30	Country Dance (Guests: Dancers of Palestine and the Hebrew Youth Cultural Group, Adrian Hall-caller)
Thursday	2:30	News
	2:45	Metropolitan Museum of Art: American Prints
	3:15	Children's Story – A Voyage to Brobdingnag
	8:00	News
	8:15	Bob Edge – Sports Comments
	8:30	Visual Quiz

[166] Test patterns and sign off times were roughly the same throughout the week.

Friday	2:30	News
	2:45	Film
	3:15	Children's Story – A Voyage to Brobdingnag
	8:00	News
	8:15	Special Event
	9:00	Metropolitan Badminton Assoc. Tournament, 6th Round
Saturday	2:30	Film[167]

Throughout this period, WCBW-TV still couldn't qualify as a commercial station so it continued to offer the programming on what it described as an experimental basis. As the crew became more comfortable with the medium, CBS television settled into a routine and each program became a learning experience for future broadcasts. Pearl Harbor would change everything. But well before that day, television had strong signs that this era of commercial broadcasting wouldn't be the catalyst for a new information and entertainment medium.[168]

TELEVISION GOES TO WAR

The United States may not have officially joined World War II until after Pearl Harbor, but American business had already started making the transition to war production. Broadcast technology production was already mostly devoted to defense issues by the middle of 1941. Commercial television had to forge ahead with no guarantees that the equipment needed for broadcasting a signal, the television sets needed to view the programs, and even the personnel necessary to run the station would be

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[167] "CBS Television Program Test Schedule," 17 November 1941; WCBS 1/23/43-12/13/46; (FCC-DB).

[168] Additional background on the start of commercial television from Ritchie, 120; Von Schilling, 37-47; Hubbell, *4000 Years,* 154, 157-8, 193; Kisseloff, 69-79; Bliss, 219-221; Columbia Broadcasting System, *1941Annual Report*," 6 April 1942; (CBS-RL); CBS, "Supplemental Report of Television Program Activities;" Miner, 159-171; CBS, "History of WCBS-TV."

available. CBS had to work without portable television equipment which forced the crew into using the Grand Central Terminal studios for all live programming, putting an unexpected strain on the people and equipment at WCBW.

As early as October 1941, manufacturers stopped guaranteeing the delivery of transmitters and studio equipment that had already been ordered. Almost all television set manufacturing had been stopped by this time as well. RCA and Du Mont Laboratories were able to piece together a few hundred sets just from the parts they had on hand.

Even with this bleak scenario, the FCC continued to get requests for new television stations across the country. The commission granted construction permits for Du Mont in New York, Philco in Philadelphia, NBC in Washington, D.C., Zenith and Balaban and Katz in Chicago, the *Milwaukee Journal* in that city, as well as Don Lee and Earle Anthony in Los Angeles.[169]

Each day of broadcasting in 1941 provided the television crews the chance to continue their "errors in advance" as they gradually learned new production techniques and program niches. The staff at WCBW-TV had to put that experience to the test with little preparation on the day commercial television confronted its first national emergency.

PEARL HARBOR

The Japanese bombing of the U.S. base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii took our military and our nation by surprise. The attack also couldn't have come on a worse day for WCBW. Channel 2 provided programming six days out of seven in 1941. The only day the station stayed dark was Sunday. Sunday was the one day that the television crew

[169]CBS, "A Statement of Some Television Facts;" FCC, "Chronological Development."

could rest after their long week of programming. The wire services started spitting out information about the attacks around 2:30 P.M. Sunday, December 7, 1941.

Gilbert Seldes was in bed with a bad cold at his house in Croton Falls, New York that day. Worthington Miner was working on a drainpipe in his house in Kent. Bob Bendick thought he was on his boat in the sound most of the day, but his wife Jeanne remembers going for a long walk in Central Park before hearing the news. Bob Skedgell was in his little apartment on 29th Street in Manhattan listening to the Philharmonic on the radio. He heard the first bulletin about the attack and quickly raced the dozen or so blocks between his apartment and the television studio. "I just took off," said Skedgell, "grabbed a hat or whatever and I ran up Park Avenue until I got to the office." The WCBW crew filtered into the Grand Central Terminal studio throughout the afternoon. On that day, the staff would have to adapt its "take-it-easy" informal style to a program with no script and grave implications.

WCBW wasn't completely unprepared for the special broadcast. The graphics people had worked on maps of the Pacific Ocean region back in the summer after threats of hostilities breaking out in that area. But now, the production crew had to quickly decide on a set or backdrop for presenting the information. They weren't just concerned with that day's broadcast. They sensed the gravity of the attack and envisioned days or weeks of special reports. The staff ruled out using the news set because those maps mostly concerned the European theater of war. Instead, the crew built an entirely new set that day.

The new set included nine different geographic regions, including a huge map of the world that measured sixteen feet by five feet. Then the staff had to light the set and run microphones and cameras to that part of the massive studio. After four hours of work, the new set was ready for use. Director of Television Adrian Murphy had wanted

to get on the air before 3:00 P.M. with the latest information. But because of confusing information coming in from the attack, unconfirmed reports, and the work on the new set, WCBW would wait almost six more hours before going on the air.

WCBW and CBS Television news changed that evening. The live broadcast that hit the air at 8:45 P.M. couldn't be scripted or rehearsed. Skedgell handled all the latest developments from the wire services while Hubbell presented that information on the broadcast. Skedgell stood by the wire machine in the newsroom and ripped off the paper each time a new bulletin spit out of the machine. He'd type up a synopsis of the latest information and hurry from the small newsroom across the studio to the special war set. "My job was to from time to time write a summary of what we knew," said Skedgell, "and I'd hand it to Dick and he'd put it on the air." Hubbell shared the on-air duties with Seldes that evening as they traded off presenting the latest information and interviewing guests. The national emergency even broke down the unspoken wall between CBS radio and television. WCBW executives convinced radio announcers and experts such as George Fielding Elliot and Linton Wells to come down to Grand Central during the evening and give information and commentary on the attack.

The live, always-changing, broadcast stretched the production crew to its limits as well. They didn't have an adequate way to communicate between the control room and the set. Most of their programs up to that point had been either scripted or at least rehearsed in advance. Now, the crews had to be able to make decisions on a split-second basis and the director had to be able to follow their lead. So the staff came up with special hand signals and other methods of quick communication that evening.

The WCBW special report that night lasted less than ninety minutes. But that special broadcast pushed the limits of live television in 1941 and opened up new possibilities for future broadcasts. As CBS wrote in a special report to the FCC, the

unscheduled live news broadcast on December 7th "was unquestionably the most stimulating challenge and marked the greatest advance of any single problem faced up to that time."[170]

That night was just the beginning. WCBW scrambled to cover the fallout from the attack and the United States' entry into the war. Staff members who lived outside of Manhattan slept at the station to make sure they were ready for important developments. Bob Bendick normally handled studio camera duties, but filled in wherever needed during those hectic days after the attack. He didn't go home for three days. "You were really hopped up and anxious and working like mad," remembers Bendick, "and everybody was torn between the business and the horror of 'god what are we getting into' and the excitement of being in a communications medium that could bring this to the world." Because of the lessons learned on the special broadcast, WCBW added in more news updates after Pearl Harbor and was able to provide late-breaking news at other times during the broadcast day when necessary.

A major challenge came on December 8th. President Roosevelt would be addressing a joint session of Congress and asking for a declaration of war. WCBW had never tried to run a live radio broadcast over the television station in the past, but the crew knew it had an obligation to its viewers to offer Roosevelt's speech. The engineers worked feverishly in the hours leading up to FDR's appearance in Congress to bring the radio signal into the television studio so it could be run through the audio board and then transmitted as part of the television signal. That solved the audio part of the dilemma. But what could they show on camera while FDR was speaking? Since WCBW still hadn't received the mobile broadcasting unit that had been ordered the previous year, the station couldn't provide video of the speech. The elaborate maps wouldn't be

[170]CBS, "Supplemental Report," 131.

appropriate since the crew didn't have an advance copy of the speech to be able to follow along and have the necessary maps ready to show on the air.

Rudy Bretz had an idea. He ran out and found an American flag on a stand. He put that on a table out on the set. Then Bretz set up an electric fan off camera. When Roosevelt got ready to speak, Bretz turned on the fan. Those few people in New York who could get WCBW on their television sets heard the President make his famous speech about "a day that will live in infamy" while they watched an American flag blowing in a man-made breeze.[171]

WAR FOCUS

Pearl Harbor galvanized the country and brought most people behind the government's main goal of winning the war. Like the nation, television quickly took on projects to show its support for the war effort. These projects presented some early signs of the role television would play in the future.

At WCBW, the war at first pumped added life and purpose to the programming. The special broadcasts after the attack on Pearl Harbor forced the television crew to rethink both its programming mission as well as basic techniques for presenting the latest information.

Pearl Harbor also gave the television crew a crash-course in breaking news coverage, live on the air. With the information coming in so rapidly, they could no longer rely on a pre-produced rundown of stories as well as scripts with clearly defined information. The newscast could no longer just be Richard Hubbell standing in front of maps reading stories re-written from the United Press wire service. Now, WCBW was

[171]Pearl harbor CBS broadcast information from Skedgell and Bendick interviews, (RS-OH1/2)(RB-OH1/2); CBS News, *Television News Reporting* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1958), 3-7; Supplemental Report;" Hubbell, *4000 Years,* 193-194; Miner, 172; Kisseloff, 78-79; Bliss, 220-221.

bringing in analysts and experts such as Robert Aura Smith of the *New York Times;* Fletcher Pratt, naval expert from the *New York Post*; and General Sewell of the British Army.

After the crew at WCBW realized it could present information quickly without the constraints of earlier efforts, the amount of news increased dramatically. After Pearl Harbor Day, WCBW started offering additional news summaries at the beginning and end of both the afternoon and evening programming blocks. Entertainment shows were cancelled in favor of programs on the strategies of war as well as the efforts at home to conserve resources. The station now regularly exceeded its 15-hour-a-week schedule on the air.

WCBW even explored the potential for interactivity as part of its war programming. On January 9, 1942, the station worked with the United States Treasury on the first televised war bond sale. To generate interest, the station put a telephone in the studio and brought in boxing legend Jack Dempsey. People who called the station to buy a war bond not only got to talk to Dempsey, they could watch the fighter on the phone during the conversation on WCBW. The 90-minute program raised more than $100,000 in war bonds. Three weeks later, the station once again used this method in an auction to raise money to fight infantile paralysis. Dempsey and Guy Lombardo were among the personalities who answered the phone live on the air as people bid on a signed document from President Franklin Roosevelt. "The telephonic link between audience and studio," reported CBS to the FCC later that year, "evoked a greater sense of excitement and immediacy than had been achieved by any other approach to television."[172]

[172]CBS, "Supplemental Report."

The sports and entertainment programs were also transformed. The badminton and table tennis tournaments were replaced by boxing matches in the studios. The different branches of the armed services squared off in the ring each week for bragging rights. Even the Arthur Murray dance instructors changed their tune. Instead of their usual ballroom dance tips, instead the instructors started teaching Stage Door Canteen hostesses the dances most preferred by men in the service.

NBC also adapted its programming. WNBT installed an Associated Press news wire in its studio and a camera focused on the copy as it came out of the machine. NBC radio commentators started spending time on the television station to offer their insight and opinions. H.V. Kaltenborn appeared on Channel 1 during this period, as he had moved over from CBS the previous year in a fight over a commentator's right to editorialize.

WNBT ran a film that January to show people how to extinguish incendiary bombs. Then the station presented a lecture on tools needed by an air-raid warden. Those programs went over so well, NBC dedicated its station to helping train air raid wardens around the city. Television sets were moved to public locations, like police and fire stations, so air raid wardens could gather and watch special programming on WNBT.

TV programmers had found ways to make a real impact with the medium. But just as television started to find its purpose, the very situation that inspired the programming overwhelmed the industry and extinguished almost all visual broadcasting.

TELEVISION RESOURCES RE-ALLOCATED FOR WAR EFFORT

The limited supply of television equipment and personnel eventually dropped to a point that stations couldn't continue under the FCC regulations. More and more engineers were pulled from station operation to work on secret war electronics which

would later be unveiled as radar. Many others were drafted or voluntarily joined the war effort. The few experienced television people left at the stations had a tough time keeping the stations on the air. Since manufacturing was now dedicated to the war efforts, television engineers couldn't get replacement parts when equipment broke. They were also worried that the 15-hour programming week put too much strain on the equipment which couldn't be replaced for the foreseeable future.

In May 1942, the FCC cut the minimum number of weekly programming hours from fifteen to four. Later that month, WCBW and WNBT announced plans to reduce services to the four hour level. By December 1942, WCBW shut down its studio and offered only film presentations every Thursday and Friday night to conserve equipment. CBS only had a limited number of iconoscope pick-up tubes and new ones weren't available. Some of the tubes had been used almost ten times longer than the suggested 250 hours. Live programming put a much bigger strain on the tubes than running films so the station opted to close the "world's largest studio."

Of the 24 members of the CBS Television Programming Department at the start of 1942, 17 ended up in the service over the next few years. Engineers were moved into war research. Others were absorbed back into CBS radio. CBS's great television experiment was over, at least for the next few years.

CBS's first regularly-scheduled television newscasts have mostly been forgotten over the years. First of all, not many people saw those newscasts because of the limited number of television sets and the station's unfortunate channel position. The interruption in service during the war caused many of the people involved in the newscasts to move on to other projects, never to return to CBS-TV news. Plus, the television effort was physically removed from the rest of CBS, operating out of the massive open space above

the train station. As a result, even some members of the next era of CBS-TV news, just a few years later, weren't aware of the twice-daily newscasts in 1941.

But these newscasts are significant for several reasons. First, even with the limits of pre-war television, CBS put a substantial amount of work into those newscasts. Two men were entirely devoted to the newscasts, with countless other program personnel and engineers working on the newscast every day. Plus, the television executives made a conscious decision to create a television program and not just simulcast a radio broadcast. In addition, CBS stuck with its news commitment, offering at least 30 minutes of news daily until World War II restrictions made that task impossible. The 1941 WCBW newscast also marks the first collaboration between the honored CBS radio news department and the pioneers of the CBS Television Programming Department.

Even just a few years later with all the improvements in television brought about by war research, the simple news set relying almost entirely on maps seemed quaint and archaic. But during those months, Hubbell, Skedgell, and the others experimented with the tools they had. Critics at the time noticed the effort. *Fortune* magazine didn't pull any punches in its look back at pre-war television a few years later: "It was a horror, in fact, compounded of radio's early gawky days, the movies' mottled green period, and amateur night." But the writer singled out the CBS newscasts, saying the station was "in the process of a more considered approach to the problem (of pre-war TV), with emphasis on new techniques in news telecasting."[173]

As WCBW winded down its live programming in 1942, Bob Skedgell was no longer needed. He was re-assigned to the radio newsroom where he happily rejoined the people with whom he had started his career. Skedgell had spent close to a year as CBS's first television news writer. He had witnessed the birth of commercial television in this

[173]"The Promise of Television," *Fortune,* 204.

country and had full control over the content in an ambitious schedule of two daily newscasts. His radio news colleagues weren't very interested in his television experience and rarely asked him about the work he had done. Skedgell himself had no intention of returning to WCBW if it ever restarted a news effort. In November 1942, he enlisted in the army. Robert Skedgell was only 23 years old. And he still didn't own a television set.[174]

[174] War effort information from Bendick and Skedgell interviews, (RB-OH1/2)(RS-OH1/2); "Television to the Colors: Radio Youngster Proves Worthy as Civilian Defense Aid," *Newsweek,* 19 January 1942, 52-53; Hubbell, *4000 Years,* 195-199; "Television Develops New Presentation of War News as Events Occur Swiftly," *Broadcasting,* 15 December 1941, 16; "CBS Television to Broadcast Four Hour Weekly Program Schedule," CBS Press Release, 22 May 1942; TVB Stations N.Y. WCBS-TV History(WCBW);(CBS-RL); "NBC, CBS Reduce Time for New York Television," *Broadcasting,* 1 June 1942,48.

Chapter 4:

CBS TV News: 1944-1945

Creating a Template for Television News

Henry Cassirer was only looking for a job with a future and maybe a new challenge when he stepped into New York City's Grand Central Terminal in the spring of 1944. Cassirer had been working with CBS News for more than three-and-a-half-years but like most of the people working on the radio side, he had been oblivious to the video end of the company. "Nobody had heard of television," Cassirer remembers, "it was almost a secret thing at CBS."[175] Granted, the WCBW studio had been dark for 17 months because of World War II, but Cassirer's time at CBS dated back to September 1940. The ambitious two-a-day newscasts on WCBW-TV in 1941 apparently had little impact on the radio news staff on the 17th floor at 485 Madison Avenue, located ten blocks north of the Grand Central Terminal. Cassirer had moved to New York in 1940 after working for the BBC in London. He soon joined the CBS News department in the Shortwave Listening Station.

Cassirer first visited the WCBW studios after a casual conversation with radio newscaster Ned Calmer. Calmer told Cassirer he was making a little extra money on the side by doing television news over at WCBW. Cassirer could use some extra work, so he decided to check out this "secret" CBS broadcast. Just like Robert Skedgell three years

[175]Henry Cassirer, interview by author, 21-22 July 2003, Annecy-Le-Vieux, France, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (HC-OH).

earlier, Cassirer felt he'd entered a new world in May 1944 when he first gazed down upon the massive studio just a few floors above the train station:

> Two cameras on heavy pedestal or dollies, pushed around by cameramen in shirt sleeves. Some glaring lights on the floor illuminated the three-sided news bay. Stage hands with ear phones linked by long cables executed instructions from the control room. The newscaster's desk was in the centre, large maps covered the panels to his right and left. Modern electronics was placed in a setting where everything was made and moved by hand.[176]

Cassirer and Skedgell's first look at the WCBW studio may have been separated by three years, but the view was roughly the same. World War II had stopped the momentum of television cold, and by 1944 CBS had just begun taking tentative steps to re-launch its video offspring. The network was determined that this time, CBS-TV would start slowly and NBC would not be allowed to monopolize the medium.

WORLD WAR II PUSHES TELEVISION SERVICE ASIDE

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor didn't end television in the United States. On the contrary, a few stations actually stepped up their programming, especially in news and public affairs. But when the U.S. entered the war, both the people and the technology needed to keep the stations on the air were diverted to defense projects. So television slowly sank back to its decades-old status as just another interesting idea that had yet to capture the attention of an audience.

Television didn't disappear during the war, but most stations limited programming to a few hours a week. NBC and CBS in New York both shut down their television studios in 1942 so WNBT and WCBW could only offer viewers short movies and educational films. CBS estimated it took 600 man-hours of work by engineers to

[176]Henry R. Cassirer, *Seeds in the Winds of Change: Through Education and Communication* (Dereham, England: Peter Francis Publishers, 1989), 151.

present 15-hours of programming a week. That number dropped to 160 man-hours when the schedule was cut to four hours in the middle of 1942. Only 80 hours of engineering time were needed to transmit four hours of films after the studio was shut down in December 1942.

The age and availability of iconoscope tubes also became a key concern. By the end of 1943, CBS only owned nine of these devices which were necessary for studio cameras and broadcasting of films. Only two of the nine tubes had fewer than the 250 hours of usage guaranteed by the manufacturer. Two others had been used for more than 2200 hours already. CBS engineers found that after a tube became so worn out that it would no longer work in a studio camera, that same tube could still be used for projecting film. Since the network didn't know when it would ever receive a new tube, the film programming became the best way to keep WCBW on the air as long as possible.[177]

Even though CBS dramatically cut down on the people and hours dedicated to WCBW, the network didn't cut back on its number of engineers. In fact, the company added more people as the war continued. During 1943, CBS hired 12 new television engineers to add to the 32 already on staff. The engineering staff and the equipment had to take over another floor because of the expansion. By this time, the CBS television engineering staff concentrated almost entirely on war-related projects. In April 1942, the network signed a contract to turn over its engineering staff and laboratories for the "prosecution of certain secret phases of radio warfare." The "secret phases" turned out to be equipment to help jam German radar systems so Allied pilots could more easily fly their bombing missions without detection by the Nazis.[178]

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[177]Engineering hours from CBS, "Introductory Statement," 1 December 1942,p. 2; WCBS 1/23/43-12/13/46; (FCC-DB); iconoscope tubes from CBS, "A Report on CBS Television for The Year 1943,"pps. 4-6; WCBS 1/23/43-12/13/46; (FCC-DB).

[178]CBS, "The Year 1943," 2-3; anti-radar equipment from Goldmark, *Maverick Inventor,* 66-78.

Programming During the War

Not all television stations gave up on studio entertainment. During the war, the Du Mont Laboratories station, W2XWV, continued to provide live programming on a periodic basis for viewers in New York City. But the most ambitious company during the war years proved to be General Electric. GE had been experimenting with television in Schenectady, New York since the late 1920s. The station, originally known as WGY when it employed a mechanical television system, broadcast the first television drama, *The Queen's Messenger,* back in 1928. The electronic version of the station, W2XB, started broadcasting in 1939 and became part of the three station network covering the 1940 political conventions, along with RCA in New York and Philco in Philadelphia.

General Electric chose the wrong time to shut down its television service in order to build a new operation. GE started to modernize its Schenectady station just before the FCC announced the beginning of commercial television in July 1941. So the station wasn't able to hit the air with CBS and NBC on that day. But by February 1942, GE secured a commercial television license and the station signed on as WRGB, honor of the company's television pioneer, Walter R.G. Baker.

While most other stations ran a few hours of films each week, WRGB operated on the pre-war model of 15 hours a week of both live and filmed programming. GE's decision to update its television facility in 1941 proved to be a critical move, because the company was able to install the latest equipment just before the government announced material restrictions. Because of the link between the RCA, Philco, and GE stations, WRGB ran a mix of programming from WNBT in New York as well as from its own studios in Schenectady.[179]

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[179]information on Du Mont and GE television from Allen Du Mont, "FCC Testimony," 11 October 1945, 5; Television: Statements Presented at TV Meetings 7/13 and 8/2/45; TV History-Gus

With the exception of WRGB and a few other attempts at new programming, television stations mostly concentrated on presenting the FCC-mandated four hour weekly broadcast as cheaply as possible. Innovation and experimentation would have to wait until the stations had more people and some sign that new equipment and parts would be available. Plus, the lackluster sales of television sets before Pearl Harbor meant few people could complain about the limited programming. Only about 7,500 to 8,000 sets had been sold in the United States before wartime restrictions took hold. Roughly 5,000 of those receivers were located in the New York City area.[180]

WAR-TIME SACRIFICES AND POST-WAR DREAMS

The painful realities of battle pushed aside the hard struggles of the depression. The most obvious and tragic sacrifices involved the men and women who would never return home from the battlefield. But the soldiers who survived also paid a price, from time lost, to the psychological effects of warfare.

Here at home, people had to changes their lives in order to help the country build the war machinery and pay for the conflict. Gas was rationed, nylons became a future luxury, old cars were patched together to keep running for a few more years, and people were constantly reminded to spend part of their paycheck on war bonds.

Americans made these sacrifices with little dissent. Unlike future conflicts, World War II had almost the full support of the people. The faction that had argued against U.S. involvement in the fight against Hitler dissolved with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Men hurried to recruiting offices to sign up for battle. Manufacturing companies quickly turned their plants into assembly lines for tanks, planes and other

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Zaharis; (FCC-HD); FCC, "Chronological Development of TV," 16; Porter, "Play is Broadcast…;" and Von Schilling, 45-52.

[180]"Video Variations-Facts and Figures," *The 1946 Radio Annual,* Radio Daily, 979.

necessary war equipment. Women flocked to the manufacturing plants to replace the men who had left for the war.

Companies had to find different ways to do business when many of their best people left for an indefinite period of time. By 1943, 724 CBS employees had enlisted or were drafted. As of March 1945, 54% of all male employees working at CBS on Pearl Harbor Day had left for military service, which was double the national average. This included 17 of the 24 men who worked in the WCBW programming department before the war.[181]

By 1944, the mood in this country started to change. The Allies appeared to be turning the momentum in their favor against Germany. Guarded talk of an invasion of Europe started to filter through the media. The end of the war would mean the end of sacrifices. So with each battle that signaled a defeat for the Axis powers, U.S. soldiers and civilians alike started to dream of post-war America. The restrictions would be lifted; the depression would be a distant memory. What would they buy first? Manufacturers, retailers, and research firms started to plant the seed of a prosperous post-war economy. Countless polls were taken, some scientific and others wishful thinking, on what people would want when the troops come home.

In Kansas, the top priority would be a new washing machine. In a University of Wichita poll, the next priority after clean clothes would be a new radio. Other important appliances on Kansans' wish lists included electric refrigerators, vacuum sweepers, sewing machines, electric stoves, gas stoves, electric mangle ironers, butane and other gas refrigerators.[182]

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[181] 724 employees… from Paul Kesten, "To the Stockholders," *CBS 1943 Annual Report*, p. 9*;* (CBS-RL); 54% of male employees… from Paul Kesten, "To the Stockholders," *CBS 1944 Annual Report*, p. 11; (CBS-RL).

[182] "One Fifth of Kansas Families Found Ready to Buy Receivers," *Broadcasting,* 9 July 1945, 30.

One appliance is noticeably absent from the list: the "miracle instrument of the 20th century," as inventor Allen Du Mont called television.[183] Never mind that the century was close to half-completed and the "miracle" had yet to sell 10,000 receivers. Kansans could be forgiven for picking stoves, irons, and refrigerators over a video receiver. They were several hundred miles away from the closest television station.

RCA felt it had a better handle on what people would buy after the war. In August 1943, the company commissioned a study on post-war spending in eleven cities, including New York, Chicago, Seattle, and San Francisco. Fifty-five percent of the people felt the average home would include a TV after the war. In this research, price played a big part in whether or not people would buy a receiver. Respondents were asked if they would consider buying a combination radio-television set at a variety of prices. Only 10 percent said yes if those receivers cost $400. But the affirmative answers jumped to 61 percent when the price dropped to $200.

Price had played an important role in RCA's plan to saturate the New York market with television sets before the war. The FCC delayed commercial television for a year in 1940 because RCA started an advertising blitz with discounted prices on televisions. The company had good reason to believe the lower price would move the sets. Before the advertising blitz in 1940, RCA used the Newburgh-Poughkeepsie area as a television test market. Only one set had been sold in that area before the cost of the receiver dropped from $600 to $395. Then people started buying sets at a rate of ten a week. When the price cut experiment was expanded to New York City in 1940, the company was moving 500 receivers a week.[184]

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[183]Allen Du Mont, "Statement on FCC Docket No. 6651," 1944, p. 6; Television 1944 Allocations 2 of 4; Television: Allocations; (FCC-HD).

[184]Receiver study and prewar pricing from Thomas Joyce, "Statement to the FCC," October 1944, pp. 8-9; Television 1944 Allocations 2 of 4; Television: Allocations; (FCC-HD).

But price is only an issue if the product is sitting on the shelf in the appliance store. All the money and excitement in the world won't buy a product that isn't for sale. Television sets couldn't come rolling off the manufacturing assembly lines until war plants were turned back over to the consumer market and just as important, no new sets would be made until the government decided what to do about postwar television standards. Once again, CBS was ready to scrap the existing television system, and once again, television in the United States would be forced to find its way well before it had much of an audience to impress.

CBS-TV NEWS: BEGINNING, ONCE AGAIN.

Henry Cassirer might have sought the television work merely for the extra paycheck, but Ned Calmer, who was handling the announcing duties on the television newscast in addition to his radio job, wanted to know how Cassirer could contribute to the reborn television newscast. Good question. Cassirer worked at CBS radio as the Assistant Director of the Shortwave Listening Station. Basically, he translated foreign radio reports for the news department. Those skills didn't appear to have much in common with the tasks needed on a video news report.

So Cassirer went to the WCBW studios with Calmer one Friday night in May 1944 to see how he might contribute. For part of the newscast, Cassirer stood off-camera, in the shadows next to the news set and watched Calmer read from his prepared scripts. Calmer, who was used to the anonymity of a radio microphone, would occasionally look up from the pages and make eye contact with the camera, before glancing back down at the script before he lost his place. Cassirer also studied the war maps which flanked Calmer on each side.

After a few minutes, he moved over to the control room where the television crew sat behind the consoles and watched the broadcast on a series of television sets. Cassirer didn't like what he saw on those monitors when the director switched to the camera pointed at the maps. "The maps used were the kind one finds in schools or in an atlas, reference maps crowded with information," according to Cassirer. "The cluster of detail on the screen smothered recognition of the places in the day's news." With the prewar cameras CBS was using at this point, he said the maps came across on the screen as a confusing haze of lines and words.

Overall, Cassirer found his first television newscast to be an "unsatisfactory experience." But he had his opening. He told Calmer the newscast needed more simplified maps which would tell the war story of the day without confusing the viewer with extra information that would only be distorted by the crude cameras, not to mention the small, hazy television screens in 1944. Calmer apparently saw the value in the critique and Cassirer was added to the television news staff on a part-time basis, presumably to work on maps and graphics. Never mind that he had never drawn anything more professional than crude doodlings, Henry Cassirer now officially became part of the video news team. This time, CBS-TV news wouldn't be a short-term experiment. This time, CBS-TV news survived. Henry Cassirer became one of the first to realize the potential of television news, one of the first in a long line that would eventually include the likes of Douglas Edwards, Edward R. Murrow, Walter Cronkite, and Dan Rather.[185]

[185]Cassirer's first newscast experience from Cassirer, *Seeds,* 150-152; Henry Cassirer, "Citizen of the 20th Century," unpublished manuscript provided by author, 2002, 53-54; Cassirer interview, (HC-OH).

TENTATIVE STEPS TOWARDS POSTWAR TELEVISION

Television didn't wait for the war to end. The industry started to take some tentative steps towards rebuilding a programming schedule when news from the battle fronts started to signal the possibility of a future victory. In October 1943, WNBT presented its first live broadcast in 16 months when it set up a single camera at Madison Square Garden to broadcast a rodeo.

On April 10, 1944, WNBT reopened its New York studios, possibly to build some good will with the FCC. The reason for firing up the NBC studio cameras and lighting the set for the first time in almost two years was so FCC Chairman James Lawrence Fly could personally introduce a short film called "Patrolling the Ether." The MGM production involved a fictionalized account of FCC efforts to shut down illegal radio broadcasters in the United States, including enemy agents. At the time of the broadcast, members of Congress had suggested cutting the budget of that particular division of the FCC. Fly's appearance was sent live from New York to WPTZ in Philadelphia and WRGB in Schenectady. Stations in Chicago and Los Angeles also ran the FCC film. NBC announced WNBT would be resuming regular live studio broadcasts "as rapidly as men and material are available."[186]

In November 1943, WRGB gave newspaper editors and publishers a glimpse at the future of news media competition. The station worked with the *Albany Times-Union* newspaper and created a video version of the newspaper on live television. WRGB invited 50 newspaper and magazine executives to watch the televised paper, which included everything from the front page, financial section, comics, want ads and even a

[186]Fly broadcast from "Premiere of FCC Movie is Telecast," *Broadcasting,* 17 April 1944, 11; "Fly on Television," *Broadcasting,* 10 April 1944, 53; Harry Castleman and Walter Podrazik, *The TV Schedule Book: Four Decades of Network Programming from Sign-on to Sign-Off* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984), 2; other NBC programs from Castleman and Podrazik, 2.

department store advertisement. *Times-Union* managing editor George O. Williams worked with the station on the one-time video project and came away convinced television wouldn't hurt newspapers. "The technical requirements of television with respect to coverage of news are so precise and exacting," said Williams, "that they never, in my opinion, can supplant newspaper coverage." Others though, viewed the demonstration as a "warning."[187]

By April 1944, CBS could no longer allow the other stations to get all the attention for programming initiatives. Columbia announced it would resume live studio broadcasting at WCBW on Friday, May 5th. This signaled the first use of the Grand Central Studios since December 1942. In between the two dates, Channel 2 had shown two hours of film each Thursday and Friday night.

To get ready for live broadcasts, WCBW had to reassemble a television crew. With most of the staff off fighting the war, that task proved more difficult than expected. They were able to bring back Frances Buss, who would be needed to work as mistress of ceremonies and assistant director of programs. But Worthington Miner said the rest of the staff was "very new, very untried, untested, and totally fledgling." Miner had planned on starting rehearsals by early April, but at that time only one camera was working, only one stagehand was available, one of the directors was still under contract to the shortwave division, and Buss was in the hospital. Miner said there were no offices, "no furniture, no telephones, no nothin'." WCBW was able to hire Leo Hurwitz as a writer

[187]Williams quote from "Video Newspaper is Complete Show," *Broadcasting,* 15 November 1943, 46; "warning" from "What Will Postwar Television Be Like?" *Newsweek,* 20 December 1943, 68,70; other information from Von Schilling, 47.

and director. Hurwitz had a background in documentary and feature films and most recently had been working with the Office of War Information.[188]

But what would Columbia place in front of the cameras? The press release issued just three weeks before the resumption of live broadcasting was quite vague, referring only to "the immediate revival of program patterns developed during 1941-1942." But in case that information raised any expectations, the company followed with this interesting disclaimer: "Concurrently however it (CBS) anticipates the use of the studio as a laboratory, laying particular stress upon the testing of minimal requirements in electronic performance to guarantee acceptable production conditions." Certainly not the usual language used to drum up excitement for an expected multi-million dollar industry.

That network press release also featured a curious visual element. Columbia was still using stationery which included a picture of the distinctive CBS mechanical color camera which played a central role in the fight over television standards before the war. Was the choice of paper an oversight, a judicious use of limited paper during wartime restrictions, or a tip-off of CBS's postwar strategy for shaping the future of television in its favor? The answer would become very clear, even before WCBW had a chance to switch back on the studio lights.[189]

LIMITED HOURS

The resumption of live programming at WCBW in May 1944 had none of the anticipation or publicity which accompanied the beginning of commercial television back in July 1941. First of all, the station had never shut down. Even during the war, the few

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[188]Miner quotes from Kisseloff, 99; other information on restart from CBS Press Releases, "Leo Hurwitz Jones CBS Television Staff," 17 April 1944, and "CBS Announces Additions to Television Department Personnel," 18 April 1944; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL).

[189] "CBS Television Station WCBW to Resume 'Live' Productions," CBS Press Release, 10 April 1944; TVB Stations N.Y. WCBS-TV History (WCBW); (CBS-RL).

thousand people in the New York City area with receivers could always turn on Channel 2 on Thursday and Friday nights and see some collection of programming, although only from a film projector. In April 1944, WCBW offered a variety of films with titles such as "Young Farmers," "Women are Warriors," "Heart of New Guinea," and "The Story of the Canadian Pine."[190]

Plus, the act of presenting live programming didn't put CBS in a unique position. WRGB in Schenectady had provided innovative live and taped programming during the whole time NBC and CBS ran only film. In addition, both Du Mont and NBC had offered live programming during the previous few months.

But most importantly, CBS had no plans to try to offer anywhere near the hours of programming that had taxed the personnel and equipment back in 1941. During the war, the FCC relaxed its rules and allowed stations to cut back the minimum weekly hours from 15 to four. Columbia didn't even want to worry about four hours of live programming at the time of the re-launch. With the new schedule, WCBW would continue to run films on Thursday night and only use the studio for live programming for two hours on Friday night. Still, presenting any live programming offered a different level of commitment than CBS had been devoting to television. By running only films, the company could get by with only 168 man-hours of work a week. The television personnel were spending most of their time on projects other than WCBW programming.

During this period, the WCBW programming department consisted only of Gilbert Seldes and his secretary, and they were spending 90 percent of their time on other matters. But by re-opening the studio, WCBW expanded the programming department to 17 people. Plus, engineers had to once again man the control room and other people were

[190]CBS, "Annual Report-1944, Television Station WCBW, New York," p. 4; TVB Stations N.Y. WCBS-TV History (WCBW); (CBS-RL).

added as needed. The number of hours needed to present a mix of live and filmed programming jumped to 1180 a week. By the end of 1944, that number increased to over 2000 hours a week.[191]

When it came to what programs to actually schedule as part of the two-hour live weekly telecast, the cryptic press release proved to be accurate. WCBW went back to what had worked a few years earlier. The station offered a variety show, a quiz show, music, a recurring war program called *They Were There,* and news. Of course news. The importance of CBS radio news played a strong role in bringing news to television back in 1941, and the reputation and status of those broadcast journalists had only increased during the intervening years of world conflict.

MURROW'S (AND WHITE'S) BOYS

Broadcast journalism came of age during World War II and CBS Radio news set the standard for coverage and analysis. CBS wasn't alone in its radio coverage of the war in this country. Reporters from NBC, Mutual and other networks and stations risked their lives and came up with their own scoops and unique angles during the battles that played out across so many different countries over the war years. But the CBS crew seemed to be a cut above, either by being at the right place at the right time, coming up with just the right words and tone to describe the scene, or providing the context to put the day's event into a bigger picture. Murrow and Shirer set a high standard of journalism to reach with their early coverage of Hitler's march across Europe.

At that point, well before the United States entered the war, Columbia made a 180 degree turn in its approach to news. At the time of Hitler's invasion of Austria, Murrow and Shirer weren't even supposed to be broadcasting news. They were in Europe to

[191]Ibid., 2-3.

coordinate choir performances and political discussions. But once they demonstrated the importance and power of live war reporting, CBS changed its priorities. From then on, William Paley and Paul White let Murrow cover the war his way, with almost total control over who would be hired, how many people would be needed, and where they would be based. The network might quibble over an untrained voice, but in the end, Murrow got the people he wanted. He hired men and women for what they knew, not how they sounded.

Murrow led by example. He used words, tone and pacing as well or better than anyone in broadcast news history. Murrow's reporting and commentaries went beyond the current facts and dug into the emotion of the moment. He brought the war home to the living rooms of America, often by sacrificing his own safety to relate a personal view of the war to the listeners. In December 1943, Murrow went along on a British bombing raid over Berlin. The broadcast relating his experience on a Lancaster bomber called *D-Dog* became one of the most celebrated works of journalism during the war:

> The clouds were gone, and the sticks of incendiaries from the preceding waves made the place look like a badly laid out city with the street lights on. The small incendiaries was going down like a fistful of white rice thrown on a piece of black velvet. As Jock hauled the *Dog* up again, I was thrown to the other side of the cockpit, and there below were more incendiaries, glowing white and then turning red. The cookies—the four-thousand-pound high explosives—were bursting below like great sunflowers gone mad. And then, as we started down again, still held in the lights, I remembered that the *Dog* still had one of those cookies and a whole basket of incendiaries in his belly, and the lights still held us. And I was very frightened.[192]

On that bombing raid alone, one reporter died and another had to parachute into Germany where he was held as a prisoner until the end of the war. Even though Paley

[192]Murrow, *In Search of Light,* 73.

and White begged Murrow to stay in London and away from the bombers, he went on a total of 25 combat missions during the war.[193]

While Shirer returned to New York early in the war, Murrow kept adding new correspondents to the CBS team covering the conflict. The war was brought home to America by people like Howard K. Smith, Larry LeSueur, John Daly, Charles Collingwood, Eric Sevareid, Winston Burdette, and Bill Downs. People wanted to know as much as possible about the war experiences of these famous correspondents. In 1942 alone, three CBS correspondents had best-selling books: Cecil Brown's *Suez to Singapore,* Harry Flannery's *Assignment to Berlin,* and Smith's *Last Train from Berlin.*[194]

CBS President William Paley not only enjoyed the status that these famous correspondents brought to his company, he wanted to be part of the action as well. The President of CBS volunteered his services for the war effort and by early 1944 he was in London to work with Eisenhower on using radio broadcasts against the Germans as psychological warfare. During their free time, Murrow took Paley around London and introduced his boss to all the important people in British society. Paley wasn't the only American broadcasting network owner in London at that time. David Sarnoff of NBC was also working with Eisenhower. Sarnoff was charged with putting together a broadcasting station which could be used to reach all of the Allies during the invasion of Western Europe.

While the foreign correspondents got most of the attention and glory during the war, Paul White was putting together an impressive group of journalists for CBS in this country as well. With his title of Director of News and Special Events, White was actually Murrow's boss during the war years. Among the analysts and reporters

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[193]Cloud and Olson, 202-203; Sperber, 230-235.

[194]William S. Paley, "To the Stockholders," *CBS Annual Report 1942,* 20 March 1943, p. 4; (CBS-RL).

broadcasting for CBS from New York and Washington were Robert Trout, Maj. George Fielding Elliot, Quincy Howe, Ned Calmer, Everett Holles, Douglas Edwards, Allan Jackson, Bill Henry, and Don Pryor.

White also set up a unique service in New York to keep track of the latest news from the enemy. In an old glass-walled control room in the newsroom on the 17th floor at 485 Madison Avenue, he set up a shortwave listening station. He hired people versed in foreign languages to listen to shortwave broadcasts from Europe and other war zones. The listening post employees would listen to the broadcasts through headphones and type out a summary while listening to the information. The entire broadcast was also recorded on a wax cylinder in case they would later need a verbatim transcript.

The information was given to the CBS news reporters and analysts to add to the news from the wire services and foreign correspondents. The CBS shortwave listening station allowed the network to have a more well-rounded report, and that information was occasionally used by print competitors with attribution to CBS. That kind of recognition only helped to solidify CBS's reputation as a leader in broadcast news.[195]

Paley wasn't allowing CBS News to expand merely for reputation or prestige. The listeners wanted that information and pushed for more coverage. Before the United States entered the war, news made up only about five percent of the broadcast day on stations across the country. During the war, that percentage jumped to 20 percent on occasion and never fell below 15 percent. CBS News was building its reputation and setting an example in broadcast news at the very moment people wanted that type of programming.[196]

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[195]Paley, *CBS Annual Report 1942,* 5; Cassirer, *Seeds,* 123-128.

[196]"Radio Can Hold Its Wartime News Gains," *Broadcasting,* 3 September 1945, 15.

PREPARING FOR D-DAY

If the CBS radio news people in New York paid little attention to the rebirth of WCBW live programming in the first half of 1944, they might be excused because of other priorities at the time. As the year progressed, the rumors became stronger and stronger that the Allies were ready to invade Western Europe and confront the Nazis in France.

In February 1944, White issued a seven-page memo to his staff to get the news team ready for the important moment. He wanted his broadcasters to "keep an informative, unexcited demeanor at the microphone," no matter the tenor of the news:

> The crisis of covering fast-breaking news is a minor crisis compared with that faced by the families of the men in action. But the biggest crisis of all, of course, confronts the men who are actually in the front lines. About the only way that we can help them is to report factually, soberly and intelligently their fight for the freedom of all of us.

White added extra people to the shortwave listening station and set up a 24-hour rotation of personnel for CBS's Washington radio station, WTOP. The network operations department came up with a schedule of production personnel and engineers who would staff the news studios on a 24-hour basis if necessary, when the invasion began.[197]

Over in Europe, Murrow was also preparing for the invasion. He knew he needed more reporters to handle all the angles of the invasion and subsequent battles across Europe. Paley and White asked Murrow to resist the urge to join the troops during the invasion and instead stay in London to coordinate the coverage. Murrow filled out his staff with Charles Shaw, a Texas radio man, and William Shadel, who was covering the war for the National Rifle Association's *American Rifleman* magazine. Murrow also

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[197]Paul White, "To the CBS News Staff," Internal Memo, 29 February 1944; "40's" Unmarked File; (CBS-RL).

raided United Press for another in a long line of CBS correspondents who started at UP. Richard C. Hottelet had worked as a reporter in Berlin for UP before being thrown in jail by the Nazis in 1941. He was released before the U.S. entered the war and transferred to the UP's Washington bureau. Hottelet also spent part of the war working for the U.S. Office of War Information in London before signing on with CBS.

Like many of his colleagues, Hottelet had never talked into a microphone before joining CBS. "He wanted reporters," said Hottelet about Murrow. "He didn't care about their voices and there was no instruction on doing anything differently." So Hottelet ignored his nerves on his first CBS broadcast and remembered Murrow's goal, "his point was information—get the information, get it straight, and also get it first. It was a seamless transition." The transition would have to be seamless. Hottelet and the others were about to cover the biggest story of their lives.[198]

Unwanted Winning Streak

Richard C. Hottelet had never won so much money gambling in his life, and he didn't like the situation one bit. Hottelet and the other correspondents had been rushed to their invasion assignment in early June 1944. Hottelet knew he would be with the Ninth Air Force, but he didn't know much more. But as the hours passed and the weather didn't improve on the night of June 4th, they knew the attack wouldn't happen the next morning. To pass the time, correspondents, officers, and even the commander settled down to a colossal craps game at the air base north of London. To his surprise, Hottelet started winning. "And I won and I won and I won," he remembered, "I had all the money in the game, and I was so scared."

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[198]Hottelet quotes and background from Richard C. Hottelet, interview by author. 18 August 2003, Wilton CT., videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; (RH-OH); other background from Cloud and Olson, 198-201.

Instead of enjoying his windfall, Hottelet took it as an omen, "if this is this good tonight, it's going to be terrible when we get going." So he proceeded to commit a cardinal sin in gambling, he started loaning his winnings to people around the table to keep the game going. His lucky streak ended and eventually all of the money disappeared from his side of the table. "I lost it all and I was happy, delighted," said Hottelet, "things were back to normal."[199]

The next night, the weather cleared enough for General Dwight Eisenhower to decide to go ahead with the invasion on the morning of June 6th.

D-DAY

In New York, the first word of the invasion came across the news wires just after midnight on June 6th. NBC got the news on the air seven minutes before CBS. CBS may have been a little cautious that morning for a couple of reasons. First, the network had broadcast a false alarm just three days earlier, and secondly, the earliest information came from a German news agency. White told the editor on duty to wait until a second news service confirmed the information. At 12:48 A.M. eastern time, CBS interrupted a dance program with its first report of troops going ashore on the beaches of France.

Five hundred American correspondents had been in London in the months leading up to D-Day, hoping to take part in the invasion. The military would only allow 28 reporters and five of those came from CBS. Hottelet went with the Air Force, Collingwood and Shadel were with the Navy, while LeSueur and Downs landed with the American and British infantry. But Americans would have to wait a while to hear the dramatic first-hand accounts of the invasion. Since mobile transmission systems would have to be assembled in France after the area was secured, correspondents had to either

[199]Hottelet interview, (RH-OH).

get back to London themselves or send back a recorded report in an era when recordings were rarely used.

So for much of the day, CBS reporters and analysts in New York and Washington filled the hours with whatever news they could pull from sources or the wire services, with Murrow providing what information he had uncovered in London. In New York, Robert Trout used a specially installed 60-foot microphone cord so he could leave the studio, walk across the newsroom, and rip off the latest bulletins from AP, UP and INS, all while continuing his report. In addition to Trout, Major George Fielding Elliot, Quentin Reynolds, and Ned Calmer also spent a considerable amount of time on the air. Extra staff had been scheduled to work in the shortwave listening station as soon as the invasion began. During the first day alone, the listening station personnel monitored nearly 20,000 words of copy from a dozen different countries in a half-dozen different languages.

The first reporter to broadcast an actual eyewitness account of the Normandy invasion on CBS wasn't even from the network, but from NBC. At 4:17 A.M, Wright Bryan of WSB in Atlanta made it on the air in London with his account of flying over the beachhead in France. The military had set up a pool system so that the first reports back from Normandy would be shared by all of the networks.

Not long after Bryan, Hottelet arrived at the microphone after his dramatic trip aboard a B-26 Marauder which flew over Utah Beach just as the first boats hit the shore. Hottelet's plane flew so low after it dropped its bombs that he could smell the explosives from the ground. One of his lasting impressions of that trip was the sheer number of boats, of all shapes and sizes, heading across the English Channel, "a tremendous collection of vessels, all the landing crafts, (and that is) when I had the impression of the immensity of the operation."

By noon, New York time, most of the stations had returned to regular programming with periodic interruptions for the latest details or eyewitness reports from the invasion. CBS stayed on the air for 24 straight hours and presented 113 separate news reports, 29 of those from overseas. Trout never left the station and presented new information on the air 35 different times.[200]

Another CBS veteran played a major role in D-Day operations, but not through a microphone. Television engineer Peter Goldmark spent the war developing systems to jam German radar to help Allied bombers avoid anti-aircraft fire. For D-Day, Goldmark had been charged with tricking the Germans into thinking the invasion would occur somewhere away from Normandy. So the inventor and his staff came up with a fake navy, consisting of small wooden boats in the English Channel. The boats were designed to look like a real invasion force on German radar. The German Luftwaffe took the bait and spent precious time attacking the fake flotilla in the hours leading up to D-Day. That diversion allowed Allied bombers to take out German radar before the enemy could uncover the hoax.[201]

In this country, listeners hungered for as much information as possible on D-Day and afterwards. CBS commissioned the C.E. Hooper ratings service to measure audience levels on D-Day as compared to an average Tuesday in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles. During the morning hours, when the first reports were coming in from Europe, listening levels were 118 percent above normal. During the afternoon, the number of radio listeners was still double the Tuesday average, and the audience numbers

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[200]D-day coverage from Hottelet interview, (RH-OH); CBS, *1944 Annual Report,* 20 (CBS-RL); Bruce Robertson, "D-Day Gives Radio Greatest Opportunity," *Broadcasting,* 12 June 1944, 9; "Premature Flash Provided Test," *Broadcasting,* 12 June 1944, 18; "Invasion by Airwave," *Broadcasting,* 12 June 1944, 38; "D-Day Biggest Radio Story," *Variety,* 7 June 1944, 1; CBS News, *D-Day,* 1-61; Bliss, 154-158; Cloud and Olson, 203-209; Sperber, 238-241; Kendrick, 266-271.

[201]Goldmark, *Maverick Inventor,* 78-83; Fisher and Fisher, 310.

were still 36 percent above normal during the evening hours. For the entire day, 78 percent more people were listening to the radio on June 6, 1944 than on a typical Tuesday that year. The interest in the invasion coverage continued through the week, averaging between ten and 26 percent higher audience numbers for the period of Wednesday through Saturday.[202]

D-Day broadcasting wasn't entirely limited to radio. Some New York television stations presented invasion information as well. H.V. Kaltenborn came by the WNBT studios and gave a fifteen minute summary of the day's news, but only after a full day at the microphone for NBC radio. At Du Mont's WABD, the station scrapped its usual Tuesday night programming and instead put together a round table discussion of the invasion, led by producer Bob Emery. He also gave a summary of the latest news, while standing in front of a group of newspaper headlines.[203]

But over at WCBW, the studio was dark. No special coverage of the largest amphibious invasion in world history that day. D-Day happened on a Tuesday. WCBW only turned on its transmitter on Thursdays and Fridays. D-Day would have to wait a couple of days.

IN ANTICIPATION OF TELEVISION

Placing television directly in the long shadow of radio in the 1940s has been a popular historical frame, but not necessarily a fair representation. The comparisons are inevitable for a few main reasons. First of all, the two media share a similar delivery system consisting of a single signal sent through the airways to be captured by individual receivers. Plus, the two main American radio networks took an early interest in

[202]"Radio Listening for Week of Invasion Well Above Normal, Surveys Indicate," *Broadcasting,* 19 June 1944, 16.

[203]"Video Participates in D-Day Coverage," *Broadcasting,* 12 June 1944, 10.

television and included the new medium as part of their overall broadcasting company. Within those companies, radio was the most powerful and important medium during the decade while television slowly grew in audience size towards the end of the 1940s. In addition, many broadcast histories have been written by people who worked in radio during this era, so without the first-hand experience of either working in television or even owning one of the early receivers, the easiest path is to ignore or marginalize the pioneering efforts of early television.

While the network radio news broadcasters and the public might have been focusing on World War II during 1944, television definitely had come out of the shadow of radio for some businesses and viewers. By September 1944, six commercial television stations and three experimental stations had already signed on the air: three in New York, two in both Chicago and Los Angeles, one each in Philadelphia and Schenectady.

In addition, the FCC had authorized nearly thirty more stations for experimental broadcasting while 70 applications for television license sat in the FCC files, waiting for the commission to make decisions on how to allocate channels across the country. Newspaper publishers, radio station owners, manufacturing companies and universities were among the hopeful television station owners at that time.[204]

While fewer than 10,000 television receivers had been sold before the war, those set owners had become quite attached to their latest piece of furniture. RCA tried to buy back some of its pre-war sets in 1944. The company wanted to provide sets for its national advertisers, advertising agencies, as well as for Army and Navy hospitals where television was being used to help the patients pass the time. Even though RCA had been

[204]C.M. Braum, Broadcasting Division, Engineering Department, FCC, "Present Status of Television Broadcasting," September 1944; Television 1944 Allocations 1 of 4; Television: Allocations; (FCC-HD).

the largest manufacturer of video receivers, the company didn't have any TV sets to spare because all of its manufacturing plants were devoted to war production.

RCA was willing to pay $200 for the sets which had retailed for $395 in 1939 and 1940. The company sent letters to 48 television set owners and only heard from three, none of whom wanted to part with their sets. Curious with the lack of interest in selling these pre-war appliances, RCA then called the 48 people in New York to find out why. L.T. McNamara in the Bronx said "No Siree!" to the offer while Mario Bianchi of Port Washington told the caller he would take no less than $600 for his set. John Simonetti of Jamaica said he "won't sell under any condition," while Otto Bretz of Garden City said his set was working fine and he was enjoying every minute it was on. Joseph Cardamone of Patchogue said he wouldn't sell for any price and George Allen of Flushing told the caller "that's the last item that's going out of this house."

Fred Solimando bought one of the pre-war sets for his restaurant, Freddie's Barbecue, in Hamilton Square, New Jersey. He told RCA he'd be happy to sell the set, but only for $1,500 and he warned the company that "this offer is for a limited time only." In total, RCA was only able to buy back one television set from the group of 48.[205]

CBS-TV NEWS, TAKE TWO

Those few, rabid television fans would soon have another choice for live programming in the spring of 1944, and that programming would include news. But if any of those "videoists"[206] remembered the WCBW newscasts from 1941 and 1942, they would need to get used to a much smaller dose this time around. This time, the television

[205]Joyce, "Statement to the FCC," 20-23.

[206]An early term to describe television viewers.

effort would start on a much smaller scale, while most CBS news people were concentrating on radio coverage of the imminent invasion. Instead of two 15-minute newscasts five days a week, WCBW would start out with just one 15-minute newscast a week, since the studio would only be open on Friday nights.

At first, the newscasts wouldn't be dramatically different than what had been seen in the previous effort. The crew couldn't turn to any great new technological advancement to update the look of the newscast, or any other programming for that matter. Engineers had been working solely on war-related projects for the past few years. So WCBW would be re-starting with mostly the same equipment put into service back in 1941.

New and Old Faces

The station would return with a mix of new and old faces. Gilbert Seldes had stayed with the station as Programming Director, and Worthington Miner was still in charge of production. They were able to hire back some of the production people, such as Frances Buss, and bring in new people, including Leo Hurwitz. Cameraman Bob Bendick couldn't bring his experience to the effort just yet; he had left for the service in 1943 and wouldn't be back until the end of 1945.

The core news team would definitely be different since the two men most heavily involved in the 1941 effort weren't working at CBS in 1944. Writer Robert Skedgell had gone back into CBS radio news when his TV news writing job ended in 1942. In November of that year, Skedgell went into the army and wouldn't return to CBS until 1946.

Richard Hubbell, the announcer on the 1941 newscasts, left CBS when the WCBW studio shut down. Hubbell turned his early television experience into a series of jobs over the next few years. First, the N.W. Ayer and Son advertising agency hired him

to help the company understand the potential of commercials on television. He also edited a quarterly magazine called *Television Review*. In 1944, Cincinnati's Crosley Corporation started to get serious about adding television to its already successful group of radio stations and brought aboard Hubbell as broadcasting production manager. A few years later, he started his own television consulting company. Also during those years, Hubbell wrote two important books on early television, *4000 Years of Television* in 1942, and *Television Programming and Production* in 1945.

CBS Radio Experience

Either by chance or by choice, this time, WCBW-TV news would have closer ties to the CBS radio news department, at least for awhile. Since the newscast would only air once a week in the beginning, the network didn't have to devote someone full time to writing or announcing that 15-minute program. For the first month, that job fell to radio announcer Ned Calmer. By summer, Calmer was on his way to Europe and the Western Front to join Murrow and the rest of the foreign correspondents covering that part of the war. When Calmer left, another announcer, Everett Holles, took his place on the television newscasts. Holles brought a little more prestige to the position. In addition to his announcing duties on CBS radio, he was also the Assistant Director of News Broadcasts for CBS News, second only to Paul White in the New York operation.

Another holdover from the earlier effort would never be seen on camera, but he took a lead role in the visual look of the newscasts in the early years. Rudy Bretz handled many duties for CBS Television in those years, including camera work, editing, and other engineering duties. His creative ideas on how to present news on television became an important component and trademark of WCBW-TV news.

Program Director Seldes and Production Director Miner put together and presented most of the live programming, especially until more staff could be added to

help with the efforts. Miner didn't have much to do with the news efforts. With his Broadway and motion picture background, he worked more with the music and variety programs. Seldes took a leading role in the early newscasts, especially since the announcers, Calmer and Holles, were primarily working at CBS radio with television added on to their regular responsibilities

Henry Cassirer became one of the first people added to the news staff after WCBW re-opened its studios in May 1944. He kept his full-time job in the shortwave listening station but came down to Grand Central to work on the television newscasts after he finished his shift at the listening station.

Illustrating The News

Since Cassirer had promised to improve the visual maps for the newscast but didn't have the artistic ability to do it himself, he had to find a way to get the work done. He convinced the station to hire an artist to work on various visual elements of the news. Georg Olden joined the WCBW crew to work on war maps, and various other graphics. Olden made his mark by designing the logo adopted by the United Nation. He created the familiar globe surrounded by a wreath artwork which remains the symbol of the UN to this day. Olden's role in the early CBS-TV newscasts is important for another reason. He was one of the first, if not *the* first African-American ever hired by CBS for a professional position. Cassirer said he didn't realize the significance of the hire at the time, but instead was impressed by Olden's understanding of creating visuals for the small screen. Cassirer said he would think about a potential story and then "scribble some barely recognizable lines on paper. He (Olden) picked up from where I left off, came up with a design which we discussed frankly and critically, and finally transformed it into a professional art work suited to both story and medium." [207]

[207]"scribble some barely…" from Cassirer, *Seeds,* 160; also Cassirer, "Citizen," 60-61.

Updating the News Set

Since WCBW returned to live programming just as the Allies were getting ready to invade Western Europe, most of the news on the newscast related to war news for the first years. Just as Skedgell and Hubbell concentrated their efforts on presenting the latest from European battle fronts in 1941, the 1944 and 1945 Channel 2 newscasts also had a heavy emphasis on World War II information. The news set looked much the same as it had a few years earlier, with a few changes in the presentation and backdrop, undoubtedly in response to lessons learned during the earlier efforts.

Large maps still dominated the news set, maps which would feature the important World War II battle fronts of that day. But this time, the announcer didn't have to walk over to the maps and attempt to point out the important places, all the while reading from a script in his hand, as Hubbell had done. Instead, the announcer stayed in one place, and the director switched to a second camera which featured a close-up on the war map. Then Cassirer, standing just out of the frame of the shot, would use a simple classroom pointer to help the viewer follow the battle progression while the announcer read his script off camera. With this small change, the viewer could concentrate on the visual while the announcer could read straight from the script without worrying about looking up and losing his place.

Another change to the set allowed for a more coherent presentation of non-war news. When Hubbell had to present news that didn't relate to the European conflict, he was forced to sit on the edge of a small table and read his script, with the massive war maps surrounding him on all sides. With that backdrop, the cameras couldn't frame a shot that wouldn't involve the maps. In 1944, the production crew used one section of the backdrop for a CBS logo placed just above a large circular map of the world. The announcer would sit at a small wooden table in front of that backdrop. By sitting at a

desk, the announcer could more easily follow his scripts. The change may have been prompted by Calmer and Holles. Since these men were used to sitting at a desk and reading into a microphone for their radio newscasts, they might have felt more comfortable with that format on television. In later newscasts, the desk was taken away so the announcer was forced to balance the scripts on his knee while sitting in front of the news backdrop.

Visualizing the war had not become any easier over the years. CBS certainly didn't have any film photographers covering World War II so the news crew had to invent different ways to present the coverage to the video viewer. The network had not yet contracted with a newsreel company for war footage, so the CBS crew could only rely on sporadic government film. Even if CBS had been able to rely on newsreels, that film took days or even weeks to make it back to the United States from the battle fronts. The broadcasters had to find a way to present today's news today, by whatever means possible for the video screen.

CBS continued its pre-Pearl Harbor system of creating large maps of the different battlefronts which could be updated each day with the latest developments. Plus, with the addition of an artist the crew didn't have to only feature the war maps. Olden could create special graphics to go beyond what could be shown on a geographic representation.

The "Wizardry" of the Animated Map

But the first visual element which differentiated WCBW news from other stations came courtesy of an engineer, not a journalist. Rudy Bretz had worked side-by-side with the rest of the crew during the 1941 newscasts and other programming. No doubt he took part in the frantic work on Pearl Harbor day as the television crew had to tear apart its set and build a new backdrop to reflect the worldwide conflict. He watched Hubbell try to explain complex battle strategies by standing in front of a map. Bretz had a better idea.

He called it the "bretzicon." Others referred to it as the "animator" or the "animated map." Bretz built a small box that contained a mirror positioned at just the proper angle. A horizontal see-through tray would be positioned above the mirror, about at chest level of the person running the animator. The tray would include the artwork needed for the animated graphic, which could be a battlefront map in the case of war news. Then Bretz would create explanatory symbols such as arrows, tanks, and planes; which all included a handle on the back. The map and symbols were inside a dark box which was lit from below. The camera would be pointed at the mirror which would reflect the graphic image from above. To create motion, one or two people were stationed at the box and wore dark gloves that couldn't be seen by the camera. The operators would move the symbols back and forth on the map to simulate the latest battles or future strategy. For Bretz, the animator solved the problem of merging motion and understandable graphics under deadline pressure:

> This complete freedom was very important in animating war strategy, when last-minute news stories left little time to prepare the animation of military developments. Further, this flexibility in operation left a wide field for creative effort. Manual skill was very important, and there was found to be a great difference between a good and mediocre animator operator.[208]

CBS-TV news featured the animated map frequently during the war. When the topic involved the Allied march across France, Cassirer said the viewer would see "arrows move up from the Seine, pushing back or eliminating swastika-marked German blocks, and cut off the Channel coast. In the meantime tanks appear south of Paris, advancing where General Patton's troops are driving ahead."[209]

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[208]Rudy Bretz, *Techniques of Television Production,* Television Series, ed. Donald G. Fink (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1953) 260.

[209]Henry Cassirer, "See the News With Television," unpublished manuscript; Notes Re: News 1 of 3; Box 2G44; Henry R. Cassirer Papers, 1936-1996; Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; (HC-CAH).

Cassirer became the logical choice to "run" the animator. He knew the latest news and could listen to the announcer reading the story and move the symbols accordingly live on the air. While that delineation of duties made sense from a news point of view, it ran afoul of strict union rules. Any equipment out in the studio needed to be run by a union member. Since the union people often weren't versed in the news, the animator lost some of its effectiveness when the operator couldn't follow along with the advancements in the story.

While this crude system of moving maps seems hopelessly outdated now, back in 1944, Cassirer called the animated map the "wizard" of television news.

Presenting A Diverse Visual Experience

But the hallmark of early WCBW newscasts wasn't one particular approach, but the combination of different elements within the 15-minute newscast. The television crew would select the stories for the broadcast and brainstorm on the best ways to visualize each story. In addition to the animated maps, the stories could also feature graphics, cartoons, demonstration models, still photographs, occasional film of the event, or even just the announcer on camera reading the story. "For the viewer not to get bored, the screen must present a constant change, not only a minor change, such as an arrow moving across a map, but a change of character, a change from map to picture, to newscaster to cartoon and to film," said Cassirer back in 1944. "That is why it is not only possible but necessary that all the above mentioned elements of news presentation be utilized in the course of one show and be interwoven in quick yet logical alternation."[210]

These concepts of pacing and visualization might appear fairly obvious in the 21st Century, but this television crew was operating in an era when news hadn't yet found a common formula on the video screen. The more experienced members of the WCBW

[210]Henry Cassirer, "Telecasting The News," *Televiser,* Winter 1945, 13.

crew no doubt remembered watching a Lowell Thomas radio news simulcast on WNBT back in 1941, a format that didn't impress the viewers even in that primitive era. Plus, during 1944 as WCBW got back into live television, WNBT's news offering was a newsreel effort called *The War as it Happens*. That program consisted of government-supplied war films with an off-camera narrator reading a script to go along with the pictures. Being being entirely dependent on government film, *The War as it Happens* was a sporadic venture and only appeared on the air after a new shipment of film arrived at the station.

Novelty Wearing Off For Some Viewers

The CBS crew pushed itself to find ways to make the news not only timely, but also visually interesting and informative. No doubt, part of the pressure to improve came from viewers, especially newspaper and trade magazine critics, who pushed the visual medium to improve. One point reviewers had made clear, even back in 1941, involved television news. Those same wonderful news announcers that people could listen to night after night on radio became tiresome fairly quickly on television, especially if those broadcasters dared to read from their script. It was almost as if television was drawing back the curtain on the radio news wizard, exposing the fact that these people had to use a script and didn't just create their commentaries on the spot. In June 1944, Lowell Thomas appeared on WNBT as part of a forum on war production. *Variety* made a special point to let its readers know that "Thomas was the only participant to use a script, from which he read his lines and fed cues to his colleagues" despite his "long-time experience as radio commentator and after-dinner speaker."[211]

If WCBW didn't sense that the novelty of pictures in a box was wearing off for veteran viewers who now wanted programming to hold their interest, the station found

[211]"Lowell Thomas on NBC Video Show," *Variety,* 21 June 1944, 35.

that out after just the first weeks of live programming in May 1944. Concerning the first night, *Variety* said the WCBW "telecast reflected a lot of the things that are wrong with available transmitters and receivers…" The review chided the production personnel for letting Ned Calmer go on the air without makeup, while at the same time "staffers at Du Mont, by recent trail and error, have Max Factored with considerable success."

The next week, WCBW fixed Calmer's makeup and lighting, yet still *Variety* judged the entire two-hour live program to be "woefully weak from showmanship angle and contained little, if anything calculated to keep average viewer glued to his receiver." The writer finished the review with a warning for the CBS television crew: "CBS wouldn't be guilty of such tired programming on AM or FM because the audiences wouldn't stand for it. Tele audiences come post-war, won't stand for it either." Miner said after reading those reviews, "everybody realized that whatever we got away with in 1941 and '42, we were never going to get away with again."[212]

The pressure may have helped spur the crew into presenting a visually interesting and timely newscast, but the result came about because of a team effort from people who approached television news from different environments. Bretz used his engineering and camera background to create the moving animation. Cassirer called Leo Hurwitz the "quarterback" of the news team, since he directed many of the early newscasts. While Hurwitz came from a film background, Cassirer said he understood television and "stressed its fluidity and spontaneity, and the need for a programme director who is able to hold the show together, blend it creatively and direct it from the control room." For cameraman Edward Anhalt, Gilbert Seldes was the real "visionary" of the early

[212]WCBW reviews from "CBS Studio Show," *Variety,* 10 May 1944, 24, and "Television Followup," *Variety,* 17 May 1944, 23; Miner quote from Kisseloff, 99.

newscasts. Anhalt gives Seldes credit for pushing the format beyond radio on TV by incorporating maps, models, and films when available.[213]

Plus, Cassirer became an integral part of the newscast very quickly, even while he was still working full time at the CBS shortwave listening station. He may have sought out the television job as a way to make a little extra money, but he quickly became immersed in the world of visual news and emerged as one of the strongest advocates for the potential of television as a news medium.

CASSIRER'S UNIQUE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Since news on television still had no definite form or formula in 1944, the people who worked at WCBW news arrived at the studio door by a variety of paths. Journalists who had pursued a career in broadcast news would be more inclined to seek out the radio side of CBS. Therefore, television news became a melting pot of sorts, a gathering of people with widely diverse backgrounds, experiences, and aspirations. Dr. Henry Cassirer had certainly lived a lifetime before he joined WCBW news at age 32.

Some of Cassirer's first memories involve German troops marching by his door in Strassburg during World War I. As a three-year-old in 1914, young Reinhard[214] was rushed to an emergency shelter when the air raid sirens sounded in the then-German city.

Cassirer was born into a successful German Jewish family with interests in manufacturing, education, and the art world. His father Kurt was an art historian while his father's cousin Paul was a pioneer of impressionism. The most famous member of the family was his father's cousin, Ernst Cassirer. Ernst became one of the most celebrated philosophers of the first half of the 20th Century as he focused on the function of symbols

[213]Anhalt comments from Kisseloff, 77.

[214]Cassirer started going by the name "Henry" when he left Germany.

in human knowledge. In the last years of his life, Ernst and the younger Cassirer reunited in New York. Keeping with the family tradition, education played a big part of Reinhard's life. He studied at various universities in Germany trying to find his true calling. Before Cassirer could finish his studies, the Nazis forced him to change his plans.

As the Nazis started to gain power in Germany in the late 1920s, Cassirer noticed the increasing incidents of anti-Semitism in the country. He got involved in left wing organizations in college and tried to convince fellow students of the dangers of Hitler and his followers. In 1933, after the Reichstag was burned, a special election was called to determine who would be in control of the government. Cassirer was so worried about the Nazi threat that he voted twice. He first cast his ballot in Cologne where he was going to school. Then he hopped on the train for home where he voted again. "It was illegal," he remembers, "but a small illegality in a country filled with illegal (activities)."[215]

His cross-country voting spree wasn't enough. Hitler got control of the government and Cassirer said the change was immediate. Storm troopers arrived at the school run by members of the Cassirer family. Young children watched the men with guns around their necks search the various buildings on campus. The storm troopers assaulted Henry's father and left with family documents. Later, his uncle Fritz Solmitz was thrown in jail for running a socialist paper in Lubeck. The Nazis tortured Solmitz repeatedly in a Hamburg jail until he killed himself.

At this point, Cassirer didn't feel safe in his home country, so he moved to London to continue his studies. He earned his bachelor's degree in History from the London School of Economics in 1935 and immediately started working on his Ph.D. In an indirect way, the Nazi's stranglehold on Germany led to his broadcasting career. By

[215]Cassirer interview, (HC-OH).

the fall of 1938, Cassirer could no longer receive money from Germany for his schooling, so he was forced to look for a job. At that time, the BBC was starting a German language service to provide Germans with news and information from England. The BBC hired Cassirer as a translator and announcer. A year later, when Hitler refused to pull out of Poland, Cassirer was at the microphone to broadcast to his homeland that England had declared war on Germany.

But with England's entry into the war against Germany, Cassirer had to once again find somewhere else to live. British police started rounding up Germans and putting them in internment camps. Both Henry's father and younger brother were picked up and sent out of England. Henry was safe as long as he had a work permit. But in July 1940, the government withdrew his permit and the BBC promptly fired him. He knew without a permit, the police would soon be showing up at his door. Early the next morning, Cassirer left his apartment and walked around London all day, avoiding friends and his usual haunts. He later found out that the police knocked on his door just a few hours after he left.

Luckily, Cassirer had applied for an immigration visa to the United State a few years earlier. He made his way to the U.S. consulate and found out the visa was still valid. When police finally tracked him down, they told him he had one week to leave the country.

Before leaving London, he sought out Americans who might be able to help him find a job in radio in the U.S. That's when Cassirer first met Edward R. Murrow. Murrow wrote him an introductory letter to a top CBS executive in New York. With his thick German accent, Cassirer had little chance of landing an announcing job with CBS. But his background and experience landed him a job with the network's new short-wave listening station.

Once again, Cassirer played an important role during a significant moment of the war. He was at the listening post on June 21, 1941 when he picked up a special Nazi broadcast about Russia. His superiors at CBS started pressuring him for information because other news outlets were reporting that Germany had declared war on Russia. Cassirer heard a long, rambling diatribe from Dr. Joseph Goebbels about Russia but he heard nothing about a declaration of war. Cassirer warned the announcers not to use the war declaration even though other news media were going with that information. He was later vindicated when it was learned that Germany had invaded the Soviet Union but never officially declared war against the country.[216]

When Cassirer first got involved in television in 1944, he not only wanted the extra money, but he was looking for a job with a future. He sensed that the CBS shortwave listening station was only useful to the network until the Allies started pushing across Europe. As soon as Columbia's own correspondents could report from an area, he sensed network wouldn't need to concentrate on translating government broadcasts in New York.[217] So while the television work started out as pragmatism, it soon became his passion.

In addition to working on the newscast, Cassirer spent a considerable amount of time writing about his experiences. He sent articles to several magazines and newspapers, pushing the idea of television news. While many editors either weren't interested in the topic or rejected the manuscripts for other reasons, Cassirer did have his work published in such diverse publications as *The New York Sun, Journalism Quarterly,* and *Televiser* magazine.

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[216]Cassirer's life before CBS-TV news from Cassirer interview, (HC-OH); Cassirer, "Citizen," 3-45; Cassirer, *Seeds,* 1-129.

[217]His instincts were correct. After the war, CBS shut down the shortwave listening station and donated 96,000 pages of transcripts to the Library of Congress, "CBS Listening Post," *Broadcasting,* 3 September 1945, 42.

Cassirer's writings play an important role sixty years later because of the unique perspective they offer on the struggles and achievements of early television news practitioners. Since the videotape recorder hadn't been invented yet and newscast kinescope recordings are almost non-existent, the 1940s-era newscasts can be easily dismissed by people who were not involved. But Cassirer's manuscripts, written at the very time he was heavily involved in television news, provide a vivid view of the thought and effort that went into these newscasts.

CRITICS NOTICE THE NEWS EFFORT

Even during the first months of the re-launch of CBS-TV live programming in 1944, broadcasting critics applauded the efforts of the news crew, even while being less than kind to other CBS programs. In October, *Billboard* reviewed a night of CBS live programming and was quite vicious in its critique of the effort. During that era, CBS read an announcement each night, letting the viewers know that the programming was still experimental and was not meant to encourage people to go out and buy television sets. The reviewer amended the warning: "Going further, some of them (CBS programs) would justify the announcer adding 'Now—or forever.'" The review continued with that caustic tone but made an exception for the newscast:

> "(Everett) Holles' show is so well produced and the maps so vitally animated that it makes the rest of the airing seem off-a-worn-cuff. The news analysis doesn't stop with a map that's alive, but uses the top still news pix of the day to make the stuff seem alive. It's all done so smoothly that it proves that a top formula can be repeated day after day and is still not stale."[218]

[218]"CBS-Reviewed Thursday," *The Billboard,* 28 October 1944, 11.

A month later, Marty Schrader of *The Billboard* had even higher praise for CBS news: "There is very little that can be added to what has already been said about Ev Holles' news show. It is still the best news program on the AM or video air."[219]

LIMITED USE OF FILM IN EARLY NEWSCASTS

One obvious element was mostly absent from these WCBW-TV newscasts: moving pictures. Video, and before that—film, is one of the most critical parts of a newscast. The pictures bring the topic alive and take the viewer right to the scene of the story. The 1941-era CBS-TV news avoided the use of films to visualize the news and the 1944 edition started out with much the same approach. Instead of investing in film crews, CBS instead brought in artists, like Georg Olden, and concentrated on drawings, maps, models, and animated maps to bring the news of the day to the video viewer.

The under-utilization of such an obvious and important element of television news can be viewed from a few different angles. First of all, the newscast was heavily tilted towards World War II news. Film from the battlefronts, if it existed, took a long time getting back to the United States. By the time the television stations would have pictures, the battle would be old news. So the crew instead concentrated on graphics and maps, which could be updated on relatively short notice, depending on the latest developments.

Secondly, CBS was heavily constrained by technology during this era. Because of war production priorities, the television crew was forced to work with roughly the same equipment as from the 1941 efforts. CBS still didn't have a working "outdoor camera," which was the camera unit and huge mobile truck that allowed WNBT to present live coverage from other locations around the city. NBC had relied heavily on its

[219]Marty Schrader, "CBS-TV Review," *The Billboard,* 25 November 1944, 11-12.

live cameras back in 1941 to present sporting events from Ebbets Field, Madison Square Garden and other locations.

CBS, on the other hand, had to bring the sports into its Grand Central Terminal studios, settling for indoor events such as badminton and boxing. RCA did finally deliver a live camera unit to CBS during the war, but Columbia immediately turned it over to the U.S. Navy for war use. The Navy returned the equipment to CBS in December 1942 but with the engineering staff concentrating on defense projects, the network didn't start using its live camera unit until 1946.[220]

NBC was far ahead of CBS in another important way to bring pictures from other locations. By 1944, WNBT was already linked to the GE station in Schenectady and the Philco station in Philadelphia. For special events, those three stations could work together and bring live video from each of the cities to all of the stations.

So by contrast, WCBW-TV was very limited in its ability to take its viewers to other geographic locations. In 1941, the response to the limitation was to create and present an interesting world of news, entertainment, and sports programs right in the studio. The reliance on maps, cartoons, and animated maps for WCBW news fit into that concept of creating the programming without leaving Grand Central.

Money also played a big factor in why CBS didn't use more film in its newscast during this era. If the network wanted to position film crews around the country and in the war zones, the model had already been in use for decades. Several newsreel companies had photographers in important locations around the world. Those pictures ended up in the nation's theaters a couple of times a week. But the cost of either duplicating the newsreel crews with network photographers of its own, or even

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[220]CBS live camera information from CBS, "A Report on CBS Television or The Year 1943," 6-7; WCBS 1/23/43-12/13/46; (FCC-DB) and CBS, "FCC License Renewal Application," 29 November 1946, 16(d); WCBS 12/14/46-7/1/51; (FCC-DB).

contracting with the existing newsreel companies for footage would have been very expensive, at a time when CBS was still not even running commercials on its television station.

Another important element in the role of film in WCBW news had to do with the culture of CBS. Columbia had started as a radio company and kept radio as its overarching focus even into the early 1950s. Although Paramount Pictures had put up the money to keep the fledgling network afloat back in the early years, Paley quickly bought back Paramount's interest in the company in 1932 to keep the vision and profits to himself. When CBS got serious about television in the late 1930s, the company turned to a writer (Seldes) and a Broadway producer (Miner) as its two programming leaders. Neither of these men had experience with film. Veterans of the theater newsreels, which had been presenting visual news for decades, never were tapped for management roles at CBS-TV. Serious journalists looked down upon most newsreels as a collection of nice pictures with little news relevance. Even so, later in the 1940s, NBC turned over all of its news efforts to a newsreel company for a few years. Even Edward R. Murrow picked a newsreel company to handle the photography for his major foray into television journalism, *See It Now*.

CBS-TV news did have at least one newsreel veteran on staff in the 1940s, Larry Racies, as well as two film photographers, Leo Hurwitz and Bob Bendick, both of whom ran the news effort for a few years in the mid-1940s. But aside from those exceptions, the people who made the content and visual decisions for CBS-TV news didn't have film backgrounds.

That being said, WCBW didn't ignore the possibilities of using film during important or unique stories. Bob Bendick remembers grabbing a film camera with Eddie Anhalt when the *Normandie* ocean liner caught fire and turned over at a New York dock

in February 1942. The U.S. Government had confiscated the luxury liner and was working on turning it into a troop ship when a spark from an acetylene torch set a pile of mattresses on fire. Anhalt got on the boat while it was burning and didn't want to get off because police might confiscate the film. So he kept changing positions on the *Normandie* as it started to turn over. Police took his film anyway, and the station had to wait for it to be returned before the pictures could be shown on the air.

Anhalt started to carry a film camera with him from time to time just in case he could find a news story to shoot for the station. On one occasion, he happened upon a bank robbery while it was going on, and he captured the whole scene on film, including a shootout with police. Anhalt said Seldes was often thinking of ways visuals could be used in the newscast. Seldes once had the photographer put on a diving suit and jump into the Hudson River to film an area where the city was pumping raw sewage into the river. "There were rats crawling all over me," said Anhalt, "but we got a lot of stuff."[221] Anhalt was one of many early CBS-TV people who went on to successful movie careers. He left CBS for the army and wound up as a screenwriter in Hollywood. He won Academy Awards for Best Screenplay for both *Panic in the Streets* and *Becket*.

In this early era, shooting film for the television station seemed to be more of an occasional event, often initiated by the photographer himself. Larry Racies remembers talking to the bosses on V-E Day, May 8 1945, when crowds choked the streets of New York after the Germans surrendered. "I said, why don't we cover some of this stuff and put it on the air?" At the time, Racies was working as a technician for the television station, which meant he handled a variety of duties. In the early years, the job descriptions tended to be quite vague, which gave motivated people a chance to

[221]quote from Kisseloff, 77; *Normandie* fire and other film shoots from Bendick interview, (RB-OH2) and Kisseloff, 76-77.

experiment with different aspects of television. Racies said the station didn't really have a dedicated set of film cameras for television use at the time, but he had noticed one he might be able to use. "It was just lying around, maybe came from a lab or something," said Racies, "a lot of stuff we had in the CBS studio came from the CBS lab where they'd do a lot of experiments." Racies shot the crowd scenes from his convertible driving through Times Square and other parts of Manhattan. His pictures were shown that night on the newscast.[222]

V-E Day might have been Racies' first experience in shooting film for CBS-TV news, but he had an extensive background in both film and audio. Even before that moment in May 1945, Racies had already learned from one of the most famous crime photographers of the mid-20th century and had worked on defense films with a future President of the United States.

RACIES' FASCINATION WITH FILM

Larry Racies had a fascination with movies from an early age. As a youngster, he thought the best job in the world would be to run the projector at the local movie theater in his hometown of Antrim, New Hampshire. But only when he was hired for his dream job did he realize the life of a projectionist was "tremendously boring." "The only side benefit," remembers Racies, "was you could get a sex education by looking out to see what was going on in the balcony."

He first picked up a film camera as a way to get a letter in football at the University of New Hampshire without having to actually play the game. He found out that football managers earned the same letters as players, so he convinced the coach the team needed a manager to film the games for later viewing. Racies didn't take any

[222]Racies interview, (LR-OH2).

classes in photography, he just learned as he worked. He never finished his electrical engineering degree because he couldn't pass up an opportunity to work on Broadway during the depression. Racies now had a good-paying job in New York "when people who were graduating were going to work for Westinghouse in Springfield, Massachusetts for 35 bucks."

Racies was hired as a sound engineer for a musical comedy called *Earl Carroll's Sketchbook*. The producers were trying a special loudspeaker system which involved a large tray of water. The sound was sent through speakers and then bounced off the tray of water and into the audience. The liquid addition was supposed to give the performance a unique sound. According to Racies, the watery loudspeaker invention was "vastly overrated" and the play didn't catch on with the audience so he was soon looking for work. He spent time with a couple of sound companies before getting involved in radio. He was hired by WINS radio in New York to help with live broadcasts from the 1939 World's Fair. That job put him in the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers union (IBEW), which also represented CBS radio technicians. Around 1940, CBS had some openings on the technical side, and Racies became part of the Columbia Broadcasting System.

He may have just joined one of the most powerful radio networks in the world, but the work wasn't very glamorous. Racies started on the graveyard shift, midnight to 8:00 A.M., fixing equipment in the studios at 485 Madison Avenue.

Film Experience in the Service

When the U.S. got into World War II, Racies joined the war effort. He was able to work on both his film photography and sound engineering skills in the service, at various bases around the United States. What he really wanted was a chance to work with director Frank Capra, who was making war propaganda films in Hollywood. He

called in some favors, and was transferred to Los Angeles. But instead of Capra's unit, Racies was assigned to the Army Air Corps First Motion Picture Unit, located at the Hal Roach studios. During this period, he worked with another film veteran, Ronald Reagan. Racies remembers Reagan as "very pleasant" but if "anyone would have suggested he would become President, that would have involved a lot of thigh slapping."

When Racies was discharged, he thought seriously about staying in Hollywood and working on movies. Even though the money was good, the jobs were scarce with little chance of getting a staff position involving a steady paycheck. Meanwhile, because of war regulations, CBS had to offer veterans a chance to come back to their old job or a similar position. Racies went with the steady paycheck. He spent most of his discharge pay, $550, on a Cadillac convertible that he bought from an actress at a Hollywood canteen party. Then he raced across the country to reclaim his job before CBS withdrew the offer.

Switching to Television

Racies at first went back to the radio network, but soon the company was offering people the opportunity to transfer over to the television station. With his photography background, Racies made the switch to WCBW-TV. He noticed the difference between CBS radio and television immediately. First of all, the radio people all worked out of the headquarters at 485 Madison Avenue. The television crew spent all its hours in the cavernous halls on the third floor of the Grand Central Terminal. Even though they all worked for the same company, Racies felt completely divorced from radio when he made the switch to the video side.

He found the television operation to be "less disciplined." In radio, he'd come to work each day and pick up an operation sheet which listed all the programs and specific duties for the employees during their shift. In television in 1945, he came to work just

knowing there would be a few hours of live programming. Then it would be up to the crew to decide what needed to be done when. So as a television technician, Racies could work as a sound mixer, a camera operator, or even as a film photographer shooting an event for the newscast. He also noticed a closer camaraderie among the television staff. Gilbert Seldes on occasion would take the crew out for dinner, which Racies said would never happen in radio.

While taking part in the early years of television might have been enough for most people, Racies' real excitement came each night when he left Grand Central at midnight. That's when he started his other job.

Covering the Naked City

Racies had never stopped shooting film, even during his time with CBS radio. After the war, he bought a 35 millimeter film camera from a buddy who had smuggled it out of Germany. Racies shot freelance film for some of the top newsreel operations at the time including Fox and Pathe. The newsreels were particularly interested in crime footage and fires. So Racies would leave his CBS job at midnight and spend the rest of the nighttime hours cruising for potential stories. He and other photographers often congregated outside of police headquarters on Center Street. They'd wait for the police to get a call and then race to the scene. While several photographers were working this freelance night shift, Racies said he was the only one shooting moving pictures at the time.

He noticed that one of the photographers had come up with a better way to track down the good crime stories. This photographer owned one of the first civilian police radios and kept it in his 1938 Chevrolet so he would always be one of the first to know about a potential crime scene or fire. The man was so immersed in this world that he

rented a cheap apartment right across from police headquarters so he would always be near the action.

The photographer's name was Arthur Fellig, but Racies and the others only knew him as Weegee. Weegee had already made a name for himself for his graphic pictures of the night world of New York. He was always the first on the scene of the big stories and captured the scenes photographically with stark realism. In Weegee's[223] world, all the dead bodies had nicknames: fire victims were "roasts," drowning victims became "bottom feeders," and people who committed suicide by jumping out of buildings were "dry divers." Weegee would cruise for news all night long and spend the day peddling his photographs to various newspapers and magazines. He was also a tireless self promoter. He marked all of his photographs on the back with a stamp that read "Credit Photo By WEEGEE The Famous."

Weegee took a liking to Racies and invited him to cruise with him at night. They didn't just look for crime stories, but also celebrities. The newsreels would often buy the film from the freelancers if it involved movie or stage actors. So Weegee and Racies would head over to Lindy's on 51st and Broadway "because all the show business people and a lot of politicos went there at night," said Racies, "and we could get a lot of leads. We'd park on the corner across the street with the police radio on and when we'd get a run, we'd take off."

Since Racies was working as a freelance photographer for the newsreels, he only got paid when something happened. The city might be quiet for a month, but then he

[223]Weegee got his nickname from fellow workers at Acme News Pictures early in his career who thought he was psychic because he was always first on the scene of big stories. He was compared to the Ouija Board which was popular at that time. He changed the spelling and took on the moniker as his name. Weegee, *Weegee by Weegee* (New York: Ziff-Davis, 1961), 34.

could have a saleable story five nights in a row. But since Racies also had the full-time job with CBS, the newsreel money was gravy.

Weegee got his big break, not just from his photographs, but his choice of a book title. He put out a collection of his work under the title *Naked City*. The book was a best-seller and suddenly Weegee became a celebrity. Universal Pictures loved the phrase and paid him good money for the right to turn it into a movie. As part of the deal, Weegee had to move to Hollywood as an advisor on the project. Racies also made out quite well on the deal. Before he left for the West Coast, Weegee gave Racies his police radio, worth roughly a thousand dollars, as well as his cheap apartment near the police station.

With his nocturnal moonlighting, Racies was getting a great education in spot news film photography as well as a good idea of what stories newsreels liked to include in their theater offerings. But during the first years of CBS-TV News' re-launch, those skills weren't put to regular use since the station didn't use news film as regular part of its newscasts and Racies had other responsibilities in the television effort.[224]

"A Structure That Should Never Be Built"

While the WCBW-TV crew approached its task of re-starting live programming in 1944 with the excitement of a group of people on the forefront of an emerging media force, the attitude at the top of the company took a different course. Veterans of the 1941 launch of CBS-TV must have felt like they had been through this all before.

On Thursday April 27, 1944, while Paley and Goldmark's staff were over in Europe working on different aspects of the imminent invasion of Western Europe, while Murrow and the other CBS correspondents were preparing for their coverage of the

[224]Racies information from Racies interview, (LR-OH2); Larry Racies, interview by author, 15-16 May 2003, telephone interview, written notes, (LR-OH1); additional information on Weegee from Weegee, *Weegee,* 25-98; Weegee, *Naked City* (New York: Essential Books, 1945), 14-243.

anticipated event, and while a group of CBS employees had only eight more days to come up with a live television schedule with limited people and equipment, CBS Executive Vice President Paul Kesten and CBS Chief Television Engineer Peter Goldmark appeared at a luncheon in New York City to drop a bombshell on the postwar television debate. CBS once again wanted the FCC to scrap pre-war black and white television and instead push all television signals into a higher frequency area which incidentally would include a CBS color system.[225]

Kesten and Goldmark issued a 16-page report on why the country shouldn't have to settle for pre-war standards in a post-war world. CBS wanted the FCC to go against one of the government's primary goals during pre-war television standard battles: to keep the consumer from buying television sets which would soon become obsolete. Under the Columbia plan, the country would have to throw out the old equipment and start over with a better system as soon as the war ended. CBS admitted the public had already invested about $2 million in roughly 7 thousand television sets while the television broadcasters had spent around $20 million in research and equipment. The network argued the standards should be changed now, before manufacturers began turning out new television sets based on old technology:

> Delay, itself, may prove decisive. If the lag lengthens, if sets are sold for four or five years on pre-war standards—a later change to higher standards might go by default, for fear of jeopardizing too large a public investment. And American homes might be indefinitely deprived of brilliant, detailed television pictures.[226]

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[225]Kesten was running CBS while Paley was working on Eisenhower's staff over in England. Goldmark had skirted military rules by flying back to New York in the spring of 1944 to put together the equipment necessary for the "fake navy" on D-Day. But when he tried to fly back to Europe with the equipment, his request was rejected because he didn't have military approval to be in the U.S. So Goldmark wasn't able to witness the rehearsals or D-Day operation of his plan. Instead, he was able to join Kesten at the luncheon to push for CBS color. Goldmark, *Maverick Inventor,* 78-83.

[226]"CBS Announces Policy on Post-War Television," CBS Press Release, 27 April 1944 , p. 3; TVB Stations N.Y. WCBS-TV History (WCBW; (CBS-RL).

One reason for CBS's aggressive approach to altering the standards of American television was obvious. Columbia knew RCA was in a great position to start churning out television sets as soon as the war ended. If no one stopped Sarnoff, he would be able to finally realizing his dream of saturating the market with RCA televisions which would force all broadcasters to use RCA transmitters and other equipment.

The main person at CBS pushing this approach was once again, Goldmark. Just as he had become obsessed with color after seeing *Gone with the Wind* before the war, during his war-time work, he concentrated his efforts on UHF, ultra high frequencies. Goldmark saw UHF as a solution to many of television's, and Columbia's, problems.

Before the war, most research on television signals involved the VHF (very high frequency) band. This is the part of the spectrum where RCA had done almost all of its work. Today we know the VHF signals as those stations on channels 2-13. During the war, Goldmark and many other television engineers worked with UHF signals. Goldmark had used those frequencies to develop the jamming devices needed to thwart German radar. UHF channels could handle considerable more information than the narrow VHF signals. Plus, the UHF band was also much wider, which would allow for many more stations than would fit in the VHF range.

CBS wanted the FCC to abandon the VHF channels and move all television up onto the UHF band. The main problem with this strategy was that pre-war sets could only receive VHF signals and would be useless in this new environment. CBS thought broadcasters could continue to offer a VHF service to those people with pre-war sets while the UHF signals were perfected. Then, when the news system is ready to go, the

VHF channels would go dark and consumers with old receivers would be forced to buy new television sets, or at least adaptors to help pull in the new stations.[227]

The network believed the public shouldn't have to accept the "coarse-screen" black and white picture of pre-war television because enough breakthroughs had been made in the technology during the war:

> Enough to free television from the strait-jacket of narrow-band, black-and-white transmission. Enough to promise pictures twice as large and twice as rich in detail, as well as pictures in full and brilliant color. Enough, in sum, to make the 'good-enough' pictures of pre-war vintage seem not good enough at all, in terms of post-war possibilities.[228]

The centerpiece of the television signal improvements was, of course, CBS color. Goldmark envisioned a transmitter which would send out three separate pulses, one for each of the primary colors, to create color television. The current VHF channels didn't have enough room for this system.[229]

The reaction to the CBS proposal came down fast and came down hard. The day after the CBS announcement, the Television Broadcasters Association (TBA) released a statement ridiculing the Columbia plan as "speculation" and not based on "experience or sound technical principles." The TBA started in 1944 as an organization of television broadcasters and manufacturers designed to promote the new industry. TBA members were ready to start building and selling TV sets, as well as developing an advertiser base for the medium, as soon as the war ended. So the last scenario this organization wanted to see was another delay in the development and acceptance of television. But even by

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[227]This is a similar scenario to what is happening now in U.S. broadcasting. The government is forcing stations to switch to high definition television, but has allowed them to continue broadcasting on their old channels in the interim period.

[228]CBS Press Release, "Post War Television," 5.

[229]Information on CBS post-war TV plan from "Build for Better Television—CBS," *Broadcasting,* 1 May 1944, 9; "Jett Sees Dual Post-War Video System," *Broadcasting,* 1 May 1944, 9; CBS Press Release, "Post-War Television;" Goldmark, *Maverick Inventor,* 84-87; Von Schilling, 62-63; Fisher and Fisher, 310-311;Smith, 275-278; Paley, *As It Happened,* 194-196.

going forward with the present VHF system, the TBA still urged people to buy new sets when they became available: "The public will be agreeably surprised at the picture quality which the post-war receivers will provide, based on present transmission standards."[230]

The debate continued through the summer and came to a head when the FCC held hearings on post-war television standards in October 1944. The FCC's decision on the matter was crucial for manufacturers. No company was willing to invest the millions of dollars necessary to build the television sets without some assurances from the FCC that the system would be place at least for the foreseeable future.

Most manufacturers lined up against the CBS plan to move all television up to UHF. RCA's Chief Engineer, C.B. Jolliffe, told the commission his best guess would be that it would take at least five to ten years to develop a UHF television system. "Such a step would not be a shifting of a system to a new position in which it would remain equally operative, but the beginning of the development of a new and untried system of television." Jolliffe warned the FCC that "there are many problems which we can see now and probably many more problems, which we cannot see now or even anticipate, that have to be solved."[231]

Allen Du Mont appeared at the hearing in a dual role. Not only did he own one of the top television manufacturing companies and had started a future television network with WABD in New York; he also served as President of the TBA. Du Mont warned the commission about potential massive unemployment after the war and urged the members to allow television to continue as an important part of the post-war economy. He had no

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[230]TBA quotes from "Television Broadcasters Take Issue with CBS on Quality," *Broadcasting,* 1 May 1944, 67.

[231]C.B. Jolliffe, RCA Victor, "Statement to the FCC," October 1944; Television 1944 Allocations 2 of 4; Television: Allocations; (FCC-HD).

shame in linking TV set production to the war effort. "These are days of great decisions," Du Mont told the FCC. "Our fighting men in Europe are edging ever closer to victory. When that great day comes, our forces on the production line shall also triumph, for victory is the crowning achievement of coordinated effort at home and overseas." Du Mont also lashed out at CBS, although not by name, for its position. "Claimants of miraculous improvements have spared neither funds nor bitterness to build up synthetic support on a tissue-thin foundation."[232]

Kesten countered the attacks with the latest reports from the CBS television engineers. He told the FCC that on October 10, Columbia engineers had successfully broadcast a UHF signal "across the crowded New York skyline" and the picture had "superb clarity." Kesten predicted UHF television could be ready in less than a year after the war ended while he chastised the people in favor in VHF television. "They are making us plan here and now for a future that is, at this moment, largely of the past," said Kesten, "they are making us lay the foundation for a structure that should never be built."[233]

But CBS wasn't just fighting for a new television system, the network also had strong concerns about FCC post-war license requirement, especially in the area of broadcasting hours. The commission was recommending broadcasters offer at least six hours of programming a day, or 42 hours a week. This was a dramatic increase over the 15 weekly hours required before war time restrictions, and an unbelievable programming commitment compared to the four hours then being offered by WCBW-TV.

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[232]Allen Du Mont, "Statement to FCC on Docket 6651;" Television 1944 Allocations 2 of 4; Television: Allocations; (FCC-HD).

[233]Paul Kesten, "Statement to the FCC;" Television: Statements Presented at TV Meetings 7/13 & 8/2/45; TV History-Gus Zaharas; (FCC-HD).

Columbia representatives estimated it would take more than $3.1 million a year to provide 42 hours of programming, with little chance at earning back much in advertising during the first years. But in addition to the economics, CBS used quality as an argument against increased hours. The crew back at Grand Central might have been a little dismayed at how its leaders felt about the level of television at that time and in the future. Kesten argued that television stations could only come up with a limited number of quality programs and should be allowed to concentrate on those efforts: "Dead air will not sour the public on television, but bad programs will." He also didn't see television ever developing an audience on the scale of radio. Kesten singled out CBS's *Lux Radio Theater* which sometimes reached 30 million listeners a week. "I predict that no *Lux Radio Theater* of television, creating and presenting its own visual images, will ever attract or satisfy as many people," predicted Kesten. "A comparable stage of quality and perfection in the visual medium could be achieved only as it is done in Hollywood—by lavishing a million dollars or more on a single hour's entertainment."[234]

The FCC put aside the quality issue, but did make a decision on postwar television early in 1945. The commission ruled against the CBS plan to junk prewar television. Instead the VHF stations could continue on a commercial basis. But as an incentive to keep researchers pushing for improvements in the system, the FCC authorized the use of UHF channels on an experimental basis. CBS couldn't stop the expansion of black and white television, but the company could continue to work on its color television system. Goldmark took the decision as a challenge to prove his color television plan would be the best way to encourage people to buy television sets after the war.

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[234]Ibid.

TELEVISION RAMPS UP AS WAR WINDS DOWN

WCBW-TV started its return to live television slowly on May 5, 1944. The station would only commit to two hours of live programming a week, on Fridays, with a continuation of films on Thursdays. But less than a month later, the crew felt confident enough to open up the studios for both Thursday and Friday night programming from 8:00 P.M. to 10:00 P.M. The station would run a film in the middle of each broadcast session to allow the crew time to set up for the next program. This expansion doubled the amount of news since Channel 2 always started its broadcast at 8:00 P.M. with a 15 minute newscast. Starting on June 1st and continuing throughout the year, WCBW-TV news ran every Thursday and Friday night. Ned Calmer started as the announcer of the news, but he was soon replaced by Everett Holles. Another radio newscaster, Allan Jackson, also filled in on the video side during the year.

In the first months of service, the three New York stations had a "gentleman's agreement" not to compete directly for viewers, but instead to spread out their hours across the week. Under this arrangement, WCBW took Thursday and Friday nights, WABD ran programs on Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and WNBT handled Mondays and Saturdays. In this era in New York, all programming happened in the evening hours.[235]

WCBW broadcast a total of 355 hours in 1944, broken down roughly as 115 hours of live programming, 99 hours of motion picture film, and 141 hours of test patterns. The station ran 63 newscasts for a total of 16 hours as well as 59 discussion programs which filled 26 hours. A sample of what WCBW-TV would offer in a week's worth of programming is illustrated by the program log for one week in October:

[235]"N.Y. Tele Shows Face Competish," *Variety,* 31 May 1944, 37.

WCBW-TV Programming Schedule, October 19-20, 1944

Thursday, October 19, 1944

8:00 – 8:15 P.M.	News
8:15 - 8:45 P.M.	USO – They Were There
8:45 - 9:00 P.M.	Winslow Homer
9:00 - 9:10 P.M.	She Serves Abroad
9:10 - 9:20 P.M.	The World We Want To Live In
9:20 - 9:30 P.M.	Australia Has Wings
9:30 – 10:00 P.M.	Missus Goes A-Shopping

Friday, October 20, 1944

8:00 - 8:15 P.M.	News
8:15 - 8:45 P.M.	At Home
8:45 - 9:00 P.M.	Milton Bacon
9:00 - 9:15 P.M.	Winter on the Farm
9:15 - 9:30 P.M.	The Road to Paris
9:30 - 9:45 P.M.	Presidential Campaign
9:45 - 10:00 P.M.	Will You Remember[236]

Political Coverage on Television

The war wasn't the only major story during 1944. Also that year, Franklin Roosevelt ran for an unprecedented fourth term as President. The radio networks put together an elaborate and lengthy plan of coverage for both the political conventions as well as election night. The few television stations on the air worked with whatever equipment they had to provide political coverage for the viewers.

WNBT once again teamed up with WPTZ in Philadelphia and WRGB in Schenectady since the three stations were linked in a network system. But unlike 1940, neither political convention was scheduled for any of those three cities. Instead, both Republicans and Democrats picked Chicago for their events. The stations contracted with a newsreel company, RKO Television Corp., to handle the filming of the

[236] WCBW hours, programming and schedule from CBS, "Annual Report-1944," 1-19; TVB Stations N.Y. WCBS-TV History (WCBW); (CBS-RL).

conventions. The plan called for four cameras to be used in the Chicago Stadium, two with sound and two silent. The film would be flown to New York at various times of the day to be shown over the three television stations.

The first night of the Republican convention pointed out the problem of trying to offer daily television coverage of an event without an immediate video link to the location. The WNBT coverage of the convention was scheduled to start at 9:30 P.M on June 26 with film from that morning's opening session. But the film was delayed getting to New York so the station had to wait until 11:00 P.M. to begin its coverage, and the first offering was a pre-produced newsreel package, *The Republican Party on Parade,* which chronicled the history of the political party.

The system became smoother as the week continued, with a half-hour of highlights each night at 8:30 P.M. The Republicans nominated the ticket of Thomas Dewey and John Bricker to face Roosevelt in the fall campaign. The stations featured speeches from the convention. Newsreel producer Paul Alley at WNBT in New York would write and read narration over other scenes from the convention.

Three other television stations in the country offered coverage of the convention as well. WCBW and Du Mont's WABD in New York as well as W6XYZ in Los Angeles each shot film in Chicago and brought back highlights to run on the station. WCBW didn't schedule any special broadcast for the coverage, instead the film was used as part of a 15 minute program the following Thursday night after the newscast. All of the stations followed a similar format for the Democratic convention as well.[237]

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[237]Convention television coverage from "Radio Doubles in Brass as Convensh Jams Invasion-Clogged News Skeds," *Variety,* 21 June 1944, 30; "Delay on NBC's Convensh Films Points Up Bugs in Artificial Telenet Setups," *Variety,* 28 June 1944, 32; "Commercials To Be Dropped For Coverage of Convention," *Broadcasting,* 26 June 1944, 11,60; "Radio Delivers Superb GOP Coverage," *Broadcasting,* 3 July 1944, 12; "GOP Proceedings Telecast in the East," *Broadcasting,* 3 July 1944, 28; CBS, "Annual Report-1944."

FDR's win over Dewey on November 7, 1944 proved to be one of the biggest nights in radio history. The C.E. Hooper Inc. rating service estimated that just over half of the radio sets in the country, 50.3 percent, were in use during a three hour period on election night. This percentage of radios in use topped the previous high of 48.9 percent on Pearl Harbor Day, and the D-Day listening audience of 37.5 percent.

Television stations also took part in the drama of election night. WCBW-TV actually turned on the transmitter for Tuesday night coverage, the only time during the year the station deviated from its Thursday-Friday schedule. Channel 2 stayed on the air from 8:30 P.M. until 1:23 A.M. The network of WNBT, WPTZ, and WRGB broadcast roughly the same number of hours. WNEW radio and the *New York Daily News* worked together on a special broadcast on WABD-TV that night, featuring commentator Cesar Saerchinger[238]. In Chicago, the *Chicago Sun* newspaper worked with WBKB-TV to provide video coverage that night.[239]

TV News Competition

Throughout 1944 and 1945, WCBW-TV stuck to its four-hour weekly output of programming, although those hours shifted back and forth over time. In early 1945, the Friday night broadcasts were switched to Wednesday night. A few months later, the station opened up the studios for a third night each week, offering Tuesday, Thursday and Friday broadcasts. Viewers though couldn't settle into any long-term habits with WCBW programming. The station changed which three nights it would be on the air a few different times during 1945. Plus, the third night didn't mean an expanded program schedule, just the same four hours spread out over three days. But one area did expand

[238]Cesar Saerchinger had worked as Columbia's original European Director, before Murrow took over that position, Bliss, 71-75.

[239]Election night coverage from Robert Richards, "Networks, Stations Canceling Programs for Ballot Coverage," *Broadcasting,* 6 November 1944, 16; "Greatest Audience in History Hears Air Coverage of Election," *Broadcasting,* 13 November 1944, 16.

with the addition of the third night: news. WCBW-TV stuck with its pattern of opening each night's programming with a fifteen minute newscast. So when the station added a new night, the news crew was responsible for another newscast.

While CBS stuck with the four hours, some of the other stations were much more ambitious, some offering as many as 17 hours of weekly programming. These extended hours also involved different attempts to bring news and information to television. Throughout 1944, the only other news program on New York television was NBC's War Department newsreel program, *The War as it Happens,* which ran on Monday nights if a new edition had been prepared. By the start of 1945, WNBT also offered *The World in Your Home* every Friday night. In the summer of 1945, WABD started a 30 minute weekly program called *Magazine of the Air* on Thursdays. That effort had disappeared by the fall.

In the fall of 1945, WNBT started a more timely news program, *NBC Tele-Newsreel* on Sunday nights. Karnick points to this effort as the true beginning of NBC-TV news. A sharp distinction in how NBC and CBS television news would develop over the next ten years started with this weekly broadcast. While WCBW's newscasts, running three times a week by the fall of 1945, relied heavily on maps, graphics, animations, and still pictures, NBC turned to the theatrical newsreel companies for its content. *NBC Tele-Newsreel* consisted of film footage from the same companies presenting newsreels in the movies houses each week.[240] Even five years later, when NBC-TV News had undergone many changes and had evolved into the *Camel News Caravan,* news writer Reuven Frank remembers butting heads with old newsreel people, "and we tried to tell them that they were in the news business, there was a lot of resistance." Frank said those people had to "unlearn" such newsreel standards as

[240]A more detailed look at the evolution of news on NBC-TV in New York is in Chapter 8.

emphasizing beauty contests, animal pictures, and other visual stories with little news value.[241]

Still, CBS couldn't compete with NBC when it came to live coverage of big news events. CBS still didn't have a working live camera while NBC regularly presented programming live from various parts of New York City. On V-E Day, May 8, 1945, while Larry Racies drove around Times Square with his film camera and raced the footage to the developer so it would be ready for the evening newscast, WNBT presented 16 hours of live coverage of the celebration in New York. The same scenario played out on other big events such as Roosevelt's death in April 1945 and V-J Day in August 1945.

LOOKING FOR AN AUDIENCE

Through the first half of 1946, the programming choices offered by the few television stations couldn't have much of an impact on increasing the audience. Even the most exciting program in any medium wouldn't increase the number of people watching television. The audience size was still constrained by the number of television sets still working from the pre-war manufacturing run. New television sets couldn't be sold until they could be built. New receivers couldn't be built until the war ended and the FCC decided on standards to convince manufacturers it was worth the millions of dollars in investments to re-start the television set assembly line.

Fewer than eight thousand sets were still in working order in this country towards the end of the war. Roughly 45 hundred to five thousand of those receivers were in the New York City area. Many of those early viewers had a strong interest in the

[241]TV schedules from Castleman and Podrazik, 2-13; NBC News birth from Karnick, 26-34; Frank quotes from Frank interview, (RF-OH1).

development of television. RCA found out the loyalty when it tried to buy back some of the pre-war sets.

Over at CBS, Frank Stanton didn't think his company could get a good idea of what worked and what didn't in early television by relying on just those people who could see WCBW-TV. He was more interested in the views of people who had little experience with the visual medium.

Stanton had turned his curiosity of the broadcast audience into a Ph.D. from Ohio State University and a job at CBS right out of school. While in graduate school in the early 1930s, Stanton questioned the radio networks' methods of postcards or telephone surveys to find out what people liked on the air. He built a crude box which could be plugged into a radio to record what station was on and when. He convinced people to put the boxes in their homes and also asked them what programs they had listened to during a period of time. Stanton found a wide disparity between what people said they liked and what was actually tuned in on their radios.

Stanton sent some of his ideas and results to Paul Kesten at CBS. Kesten encouraged the research and gave him ideas on different areas to pursue. Stanton's doctoral dissertation, "A Critique of Present Methods and New Plan for Studying Radio Listening Behavior," earned him a $55-a-week job at CBS in the fall of 1935 as part of a two-person research department. During his early CBS years, Stanton and Paul Lazarsfeld developed the program analyzer. The device would measure listener responses to programs by having people push green and red buttons depending on whether or not they liked or disliked what they were hearing. They also used psychologists who would talk to the subjects about their responses to the programming.

The program analyzer became one of the most important ways for the network to decide whether or not a program had a future.[242]

In June 1944, Stanton wanted to know more about television's potential. Using the lofty title of the CBS Television Audience Research Institute, the network began conducting focus group viewing and interviews in New York City to find out what people thought of television. They asked for volunteers through a radio announcement as a way to reach people who hadn't yet seen television. A small number of people would be invited to watch television together, and then the people would be encouraged to talk about the programs. Since an effective way to record television programs hadn't been invented, the focus group sessions took place at night, and the subjects watched whatever station happened to be broadcasting that night. CBS tried to limit its focus groups to people who had either never seen television, or had limited exposure with previous programming.

After a year of these focus groups, CBS had compiled a considerable amount of data on how people responded to early television. The main gratifications involved in television viewing were satisfaction of curiosity, spontaneity, immediacy, education, and major entertainment values. People responded to the unpredictability of live television, which is why quiz shows and audience participation programs rated so high in the early years.

People in the study had the biggest problem with "eye fatigue." They had a hard time concentrating on the small screen showing a picture that wasn't always clear. But the researchers found eye strain wasn't just connected with the technology, but also with the program involved. People complained more about eye fatigue when little was happening on the screen, such as interview programs. The conclusion was that "the more

[242]Stanton background from Smith, 126-132, 152-155.

interesting and better paced the program, the less chance of complaints about eye fatigue."

News programs scored high with the people involved in the study. In fact, most of them seemed to prefer television news over radio news. They told the interviewers that the maps, charts and illustrations helped them understand what they were hearing and that they would remember longer what had been presented in the newscast.

But the subjects also had pointed criticism of news on television. They didn't react favorably to lengthy segments with only the announcer on screen. The program rated higher when it included a heavy mix of maps and animated graphics. Plus, the camera appeared to break the illusion of the immediacy of radio. Since the viewers could see the scripts in the announcer's hands, they wondered aloud how long ago the news had been prepared and if they were really getting the latest information. Some of the suggestions included putting the news wire machines in the camera shot and possibly having people hand the announcer late-breaking stories while he's reading on camera.

Television viewers also expressed a concern which would be a constant debate in the CBS-TV newsroom over the next few years. The visual medium brought a level of intimacy between the broadcaster and the viewer that hadn't been experienced with other media. In each focus group, at least one person brought up the idea that television would be part of the home and the people and programs would have to be acceptable in that environment. Those people warned "expressions, gestures, and costumes that are acceptable behind the footlight or on the screen will not be tolerated in the intimacy of the family living room." The CBS researchers wondered what kind of "invited guest" would work on television: "It may be that ordinary-looking people will have a better chance on television than they have had in the movies. Perhaps the handsome and the glamorous will have a weaker appeal in the home than in the movie palace."

The people watching television for the first time in these tests also had concerns of what television would do to the home environment. Women were more concerned than men about what effect TV would have on the family and whether or not it would change the living habits and domestic routines at home. Some speculated television would keep the kids from running all over the neighborhood and might even keep husbands at home.[243]

A CLEARER PICTURE OF TELEVISION'S FUTURE

Amidst all of the programming experiments, audience studies, articles trumpeting or lambasting the medium, and predictions of future power, one of the most important breakthroughs to push post-war television received little attention at the time.

Broadcasting magazine gave only three paragraphs in the back of its next edition to an RCA demonstration on October 25, 1945 at the WNBT studios and Madison Square Garden. The company unveiled a technological advancement that would open up entirely new possibilities for television. In both the studio and over at Madison Square Garden, the lights were dimmed and a match was lit. That scene was then shown on television monitors with an image that had never before been possible. Viewers could actually see a picture on a television screen lit by only a single match. RCA had developed the image orthicon camera tube, which was 100 times more sensitive to light than the iconoscope camera, which was the standard at the time.

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[243]CBS TV study quotes and results from Oscar Katz and Ernest Dichter, "Television Audience Research," *Tide,* compilation of articles published between 15 February and 15 July 1945, 1-14; TV Audience Surveys 1945-1972; (CBS-RL). For more early television viewer research see Charles Siepmann, *Radio, Television and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950) 317-358, "Telestatus," *Broadcasting,* 23 August 1948, 18, "Chicago TV," *Broadcasting,* 6 September 1948, 73, and "Telestatus," *Broadcasting,* 13 September 1948, 8.

Worthington Miner remembered sitting in Madison Square Garden during that demonstration and staring in amazement at a horse and rider lit only by a single match. "At that moment I knew," said Miner, "that…television was going to become an insistent part of our everyday lives." With the image orthicon, viewers no longer had to worry when long shadows started crossing the baseball diamond or football field. They would still be able to see the players and the plays on the field. Television crews wouldn't have to flood their studios with so much light that actors were in danger of suffering heat stroke. In December 1945, NBC premiered the new image orthicon cameras for the Army-Navy football game. The new cameras opened up opportunities for covering events at night, or at indoor locations without a substantial amount of extra lighting.[244]

RCA planned to start marketing the image orthicon cameras in 1946, just in time for the expansion and improvement of television, as more stations sign on the air, as experienced men and women come back to the country after the war, and as new television sets actually start showing up for sale in appliance store windows.

At the start of 1946, CBS-TV news was in a unique position. The television crew had been able to experiment with formats and gain experience for 19 months while most attention had been focused on radio. The people who followed the new medium recognized the CBS news efforts. The American Television Society singled out the CBS newscast with Everett Holles as television's "outstanding news program" for the years 1943-1945.[245] Now, the station would start gaining the experience of men and women who had spent the last years in military service. Plus, with the promise of new television sets, the newscasts could reach a much larger audience. During the next few years, CBS-

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[244]Miner quote from Miner, *Miner,* 178; other image orthicon information from "Dim Lights No Bar to New Video Tube," *Broadcasting,* 29 October 1945, 94; D.F. Schmit, "Television Gains Via Wartime Use," *The 1946 Radio Annual,* 971; Von Schilling, 69-70.

[245]"American Tele. Society Awards For 1943-4-5," *The 1946 Radio Annual,* 994.

TV News would provide a template for television news to follow for the rest of the century.

Chapter 5

CBS-TV News: 1946-1947

Waiting to Inherit the Earth

Chet Burger may have been only one of several hundred men and women coming back to CBS after the war looking for a job. But Burger had something that few others could offer—actual television experience. It wasn't much, just some experimental programs for the Army out in Los Angeles, but Henry Cassirer needed more people for the newscast in March 1946 and he fought to get Burger assigned to the television crew.

Burger and Cassirer also clicked at the job interview because they had both independently struggled with the concept of how to visualize the war. Cassirer had worked his way onto the television staff by promising more understandable maps and graphics and had spent the past two years creating and refining his ideas on what worked on the small screen. Burger had wrestled with the war picture in an entirely different environment. While in the service, he had been assigned to an information and education program for new recruits. The Army wanted him to give the soldiers the latest war news.

Burger realized the information would be meaningless unless the soldiers had some concept of world events. He was astonished at how provincial most of the men were when they got into the service, even though the United States had been fighting in the war for a couple of years by this time. "(The) war was very bitter at that time, on the Russian Front…Stalingrad," Burger remembers. "They didn't know where Russia was. They didn't know what this communist government was doing. (Were they) friends or

enemies?" So Burger had to give the men background on why we were at war and where the battles were taking place.

The army only gave him one ten-minute period a week for this exercise, and that came as soldiers were resting between training exercises. Burger first used military maps during his presentation, but they were too dense and confusing. Instead, he found an artistic soldier who could help him create his own maps. "So I began experimenting with simplifying," said Burger, "trying to find ways of making the progress of war clear. I thought it was wonderfully interesting." Cassirer had found a kindred spirit. While he was struggling with readable maps at WCBW, Burger had been going through virtually the same discovery process at an army base, miles away.

"THE VISUALIZER" AND OTHER JOB TITLES

So Chet Burger joined the WCBW news team. But he needed a title for company records. What would he be doing on the newscasts? In this era, people in television news still hadn't settled on a common set of job titles and duties. The process for presenting news on television was still being invented, altered, and refined. The more traditional "news" responsibilities found on newspapers and at radio stations mixed, and often clashed, with the more "technical" duties necessary to presenting the information live, on a visual medium. Plus, with a limited staff and unlimited ideas, the crew tended to move in and out of responsibilities and tasks as the situation warranted. Later, workplace habits and union contracts would push the jobs into more rigid categories, but at this point, the work flow was more fluid.

At first, newspapers titles moved over to television news. When Henry Cassirer quit his CBS Shortwave Listening Station job in April 1945 and became a full-time member of WCBW-TV news, his title was "news and picture editor." Basically he

worked on picking stories and determining the visual content of the newscast. But the editor title proved to be confusing since it was the same title given to the person who cut and spliced film in motion pictures and newsreels. At this point, Rudy Bretz was working as a film editor for the station.

Eventually, television news adopted titles from both newspapers and movies, which can still vary to this day, and in some ways are no less confusing. Cassirer's "news and picture editor" job evolved into what is now known as "producer," "newscast producer," or even "executive producer." In local television news, the person in charge of the news department is known as the "news director." But at the same time, the person who sits in the control room and calls out the camera shots and tape rolls is known as the "director" of the newscasts. The "editor" title is mostly used for the people who edit the videotape, but larger stations and networks often designate someone as "managing editor," which is a mid-management position involved in story selection and coverage.

Longtime CBS news producer and executive producer Don Hewitt, who played a big role in creating the modern producer position, still thinks television should go back to the newspaper titles. "I tried for years to get rid of the titles," laments Hewitt. "We took all these Hollywood show biz titles and they don't mean nothing." He considered all of his staff on *60 Minutes* to be either editors or reporters.

But back in 1946, the titles had just begun to be negotiated. Burger was being hired because he had some television experience and had struggled with how to visualize the war. So, his official position with WCBW-TV during the early years was "Visualizer." That's the title on his business card from CBS News. Burger thinks maybe Cassirer came up with the unique title, but neither man remembers for sure. No matter who came up with the moniker, it described his job duties much better than titles stolen from newspapers or movies. Basically, the team would decide on a potential list of

stories to present on the newscast that night. Burger then had the task of deciding how to "visualize" one or more of those stories. He could choose from the elements which had been a part of CBS-TV news for the past few years: artwork, graphics, animations, maps, the occasional local film, and library footage of a past event. The lessons of simplification that he learned during his orientation sessions with the soldiers fit well with his new job as he related in an article for *Televiser* magazine later in the year:

> Each visualization must be reduced to the simplest possible form, without extraneous elements, so that the final pictorial representation can be grasped quickly. It would not do to show complicated economic issues on a single piece of artwork….Television news is basically different in concept than either the radio news program or the movie newsreel, and satisfactory visualization is its keystone. …Although the basic pattern has been found, much work, experimentation and trial remain before presentation of video news attains its finished format.[246]

The "visualizer" title didn't catch on in television news. The term conjures up such grand objectives as entrusting to one person the task of satisfying one of the main senses involved in the medium, as well as the burden of making the world's events understandable for the viewer sitting at home. But Chet Burger can honestly say that he was television's first and only "visualizer."[247]

ASSEMBLING THE NEWS TEAM

If CBS-TV news people wanted to reflect on and analyze their efforts without the deadline pressures of television news, they got their last chance during the late winter and early spring of 1946. WCBW and all of the other New York stations shut down for a couple of months to work on their transmitters. The FCC had changed the specific

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[246]Chester Burger, "Visualizing The News," *Televiser,* September-October 1946, 30-31.

[247]Burger quotes and background from Chester Burger, interview by author, 11 August 2003, New York City, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (CB-OH2); Cassirer information from Cassirer interview, (HC-OH).

signals of all the stations, so broadcasters had to stop television service in order to comply with government regulations.

By the time WCBW fired back up the transmitter on Saturday, April 27 1946, the staff had gone through some significant changes since the premiere just two years previous. The leadership of CBS television shifted to bring the operation a little closer to the top management over at 485 Madison Avenue. Writer and visionary Gilbert Seldes was out, company man Larry Lowman was in. Lowman had been with CBS almost from the very beginning, starting in 1927 as the traffic manager, and was named vice-president in charge of television when he got out of the service in the summer of 1945. In making the announcement, Vice President Joseph Ream was able not only to take a swipe at Seldes' achievements but also push CBS color: "CBS believes that the promise of television cannot be realized and that the success of the new medium will be substantially deferred unless all efforts are directed to bringing the public attractive programs with satisfying picture quality."[248] Seldes stuck around for a few months as "Director of Programs" but left by September 1945. Worthington Miner continued as the manager of the television department, but he fell into disfavor with upper management and had little involvement in the programming or production.[249]

In the news area, Leo Hurwitz had become heavily involved in the newscasts, both as director and as a visualizer. Hurwitz held the title of News Director, which nominally put him in charge of the news efforts. Cassirer, as News Editor, worked with story selection, order and some of the visualization responsibilities.

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[248]"Col. Lowman New Video Head of CBS," *Broadcasting,* 28 May 1945, 18.

[249]Miner said he was kept in this TV purgatory until Paley saw how many people watched the 1947 World Series on television and turned to Miner for programming ideas. One week after NBC premiered *Texaco Star Theatre* with Milton Berle in 1948, Miner put together *Toast of the Town* with host Ed Sullivan, Miner, *Miner,* 182-184.

Bob Bendick came back from the war at the end of 1945 and he returned to the television station as a director and in charge of special events. By the start of 1946, CBS got its mobile camera unit operating and the station was finally able to present live programming from other parts of the city. WCBW immediately set up a series of sporting events to be broadcast live from Madison Square Garden. But the live telecasts on CBS looked outdated compared to what NBC could offer. Since RCA had unveiled the image orthicon camera in 1945, NBC had used that camera at various news and sports events and the pictures were dramatically better than what CBS could provide with the older orthicon and iconoscope cameras.

Georg Olden continued to work on graphics for the station and he had been joined by Tom Naegele. James McNaughton served as the Art Director for the entire station. Larry Racies and Rudy Bretz both could operate the film cameras for stories in the New York area, but Bretz spent more of his time as a film editor.

A promising director had also started to make his mark in the newscasts. Fred Rickey, like Cassirer, had transferred over to television from the CBS shortwave listening station. Over the next few years, Rickey would emerge as one of the strongest directors for the news team.

The face of WCBW news kept changing during the early years. Ned Calmer had given way fairly quickly to Everett Holles, with Allan Jackson filling in from time to time. By April 1945, Holles had moved to Chicago to work for the CBS radio news effort in that city. Jackson then spent a few months as the commentator for *CBS Television News*. The next familiar face was Tom O'Connor, who had worked as a reporter for the *PM* newspaper in New York. Dwight Cooke and Bob McKee also spent some time in the commentator's chair in 1946. The mid-1940s proved to be a time of

experimentation for television news announcers, with several people getting a chance to read the news to the New York television audience.

For Cassirer, the key to CBS-TV news in those years wasn't the collection of individual talents, but how those people worked together. With the mix of editorial and technical skills needed, he realized he couldn't hire people who would specialize in only one area. Sixty years later, he is most proud of the team that was put together in those early years. "Because television is not a one-man operation, contrary to radio," said Cassirer, "a radio man can go on by himself, but a television broadcaster can't go on by himself, if there's to be any pictures or any imaging."

To encourage the team aspect, the CBS-TV news crew held a mid-morning meeting on each day of a telecast. At 10:00 A.M., most people involved in the process would sit around a table and discuss potential stories. They were expected to have already read all the important morning newspapers as well as be familiar with the top stories on the news wires. They would decide on a tentative rundown of stories to be presented that evening. Then the work would be divvied up amongst the group. Chet Burger might be struggling with ways to visualize a lengthy report on England's post-war economy. Rudy Bretz could be editing together military film of an event from the previous week. Larry Racies may be sent out to shoot film of an event in New York. Georg Olden might be working up artwork to represent post-war unemployment. As news director and editor, Hurwitz and Cassirer worked with the staff during the day and kept track of the overall process. When it came time for the broadcast, the newscast director, which might be Hurwitz or Rickey, would work with the camera men, sound

mixers, floor directors, and news announcer on how all of the stories would come together in the live broadcast.[250]

"On A Starvation Diet, Waiting To Inherit The Earth"

By the spring of 1946, television still existed in a purgatory between success and failure. A handful of stations had been broadcasting hours of original programming for more than two years, yet not a single new television set had rolled off the assembly line since before the war. People who were working in the medium day in and day out sensed they were part of something that would eventually be big, but they kept wondering when others would be let in on the secret.

The FCC had authorized the VHF channels of 1-13 for immediate use, but only nine operations were actually broadcasting programming, either as commercial or experimental stations. More than 140 applications had flooded the FCC for these channels, but as the months went by, more than a third of these applications were withdrawn. The FCC had to postpone hearings on station allocations in Baltimore, Detroit, Cleveland, Lancaster, Providence, Pittsburgh and Harrisburg because not enough applications had been received. Some companies were scared off by the cost of building and running a television station. Others were worried that VHF would be yesterday's technology as soon as CBS worked out the bugs in its UHF color system. To show its level of commitment to the experimental color broadcasts, CBS dropped its applications for television stations in key cities and other companies followed that lead.

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[250]staff information from "Who's Who in American Television Stations," *Televiser,* May-June 1946, Box 3E20, Scrapbook Vol. 2, 1942-1947; Chester Burger Papers, 1921 to Present, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (CB-CAH); Marty Schrader, "CBS," *The Billboard,* 14 April 1945, 10; Cassirer quote from interview, (HC-OH).

AT&T completed a coaxial cable link between New York and Washington, but the nation's capital still didn't have its own television station. CBS had opened its studios the previous summer to allow companies to experiment with television advertising, but the station was still months away from its own rate card or actual program sponsorship. NBC made a big splash by announcing a sponsor, Gillette Razors, and exclusive video rights to the upcoming Joe Louis-Billy Conn heavyweight championship fight at Yankee Stadium. But fight promoters were still considering hedging their bets by also offering the fight to the newsreel companies to show in New York theaters.

The *Saturday Evening Post* skewered the present condition of television by calling it the "richest heiress in the world with no spending money," and noting the medium was "on a starvation diet waiting to inherit the earth." Even one of television's longest and loudest promoters of television, RCA's David Sarnoff, said he was ready to bury the phrase "around the corner."[251]

On the positive side, Sarnoff said he expected RCA to start turning out new television sets, transmitters, and the super-sensitive image orthicon cameras by the fall of 1946. Du Mont, determined to make a splash in the video field, spent more than a half-million dollars converting an auditorium in the John Wanamaker department store in Manhattan into the "world's largest television studio." "Studio A" was ringed with a balcony above that could seat up 400 people and standing room for 300 more. WABD-TV moved its operations to the new studio and began a nightly schedule of programming, both for the at-home television audience and the lucky people with tickets at the

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[251] magazine quotes from Alva Johnston, "Television: Boom or Bubble?," *The Saturday Evening Post,* 9 March 1946, 9-11, 134; Sarnoff quote from Brig. General David Sarnoff, "The Future of Television," *The 1948 Radio Annual,* 45; boxing rights from "Paramount-NBC Tussle Over Louis-Conn Video Rights Seen," *Broadcasting,* 13 May 1946, 96; FCC hearings from "Television Withdrawals At 57; Dropouts Cancel Hearings," *Broadcasting* 13 May 1946, 93.

department store. Daytime shoppers could watch rehearsals and a test pattern without tickets. Over in Philadelphia, WPTZ was ready to open its brand new studios, located on the 24th floor of the Architects Building. The station had previously been broadcasting from cramped quarters inside the Philco plant in Philadelphia.[252]

On the government side, broadcasters were now facing their third FCC chairman in just over a year. Industry leaders breathed a sign of relief in November 1944 when James Fly announced he was leaving the post. Broadcasters felt Fly had been meddling too closely in the affairs of radio and TV and wanted more of a hands-off approach. President Truman next appointed Paul Porter as FCC Chairman, but a year later Truman moved Porter over to the Office of Price Administration (OPA) to work on post-war inflation problems. Charles Denny became the acting FCC chairman in February 1946 after serving less than a year on the commission, but with four years experience in the agency.[253]

RETURN OF THE CONQUERING HEROES

In March 1946, while Henry Cassirer was fighting to hire Chester Burger for CBS TV news because of his limited television experience and a concern for the visuals, a different scene was playing out over at that "other" CBS News. What would the network do with all of these nationally-known, award-winning radio journalists now that the war was over?

No one could doubt the importance of the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly up at Hunter College that month. But the list of CBS News people

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[252]RCA production from Sarnoff, "The Future of Television;" Wanamaker studio from "Government, Video Celebrities at DuMont Wanamaker Debut," *Broadcasting,* 22 April 1946, 46; Philco studio from "WPTZ Commercial Shows Start May 1," *Broadcasting,* 22 April 1946, 72.

[253]Sol Taishoff, "Denny New Chairman as Porter Heads OPA," *Broadcasting,* 18 February 1946, 15.

scheduled to be involved in the radio coverage of that event was staggering: Edward R. Murrow, Charles Collingwood, Richard C. Hottelet, William L. Shirer, Bill Downs, Eric Sevareid, Larry LeSueur, Willard Shadel, Paul White, "Ted" Wells Church, Quincy Howe, Robert Trout, Ned Calmer, John Daly, Allan Jackson, and several others. Basically Murrow's Boys and White's Boys all together to create a "Who's Who" of the best of broadcast journalism covering one news story.[254]

CBS Radio could have had worse problems than an over-abundance of quality journalists as the nation shifted into a post-war consumer economy. World War II had helped make radio an indispensable part of public life. From 1940 to the end of 1945, the percentage of homes in the United States with radios increased almost 18 percent. At the start of 1946, more than nine out of every ten homes had at least one radio. And the people in those homes listened to news. In 1945, CBS radio ran 7,566 news and sports programs, second only to the 8,522 drama programs. The category of talks and discussion came in fourth, behind music.

While the war message to Americans may have been about sacrifices at home to help the war effort abroad, the Columbia Broadcasting System didn't go through much pain during World War II. On the contrary, the assets of CBS grew from $19.3 million at the start of 1940 to almost $36 million by the end of 1946. During the war years, Columbia appeared a bit hypocritical as it trumpeted its war coverage and programming and downplayed its profits. But the network made sure the important people knew how well the company was doing as in this example from an annual letter to the stockholders: "That your company prospered during 1943 is a source of less pride to its management and, I feel sure, to its stockholders, than that it met and fulfilled the urgent and multiplied

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[254]"Newsmen Gather in New York For United Nations Meeting," *Broadcasting,* 25 March 1946, 95.

needs of the Armed Forces, the United States Government, American industry and the American people at war." [255]

Post-War Adjustments

Av Westin couldn't believe his good fortune in his choice of summer jobs during college. He landed a position in the CBS newsroom as the legends came back to the 17th floor at 485 Madison Avenue. "(The) corridor was filled with the glory names of the CBS News war time group," Westin recalled. "Bill Costello, who had come back from Tokyo and Larry LeSueur who had been on the beaches on D-Day, Collingwood, Sevareid… And during the war, having been a news buff and listening to all the newscasts and here they were. 'Gosh Mr. Calmer, I remember when you were broadcasting from Rome…'"

Not all the famous correspondents came back to the States for good. Some were enjoying a little rest after the grueling years of war coverage. Others were in the country waiting for their next assignment. Plus, the network didn't immediately close down foreign bureaus as soon as the American troops came home. On the contrary, CBS expanded its elaborate system of foreign bureaus to handle the wide variety of geographic changes put in place by the war. In the spring of 1946, Howard K. Smith was in London, David Schoenbrun ran the Paris bureau, Winston Burdett worked out of Rome, Farnsworth Fowle covered the Soviet Union out of Moscow waiting for Richard C. Hottelet to come and replace him, while George Moorad was in Shanghai. CBS also had correspondents in Germany, Madrid, Buenos Aires, the Middle East, Tokyo, and Honolulu.[256]

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[255]radio homes from "Radio Homes Increase 17.9% in Five Years," *Broadcasting,* 20 May 1946, 13; CBS programming from *CBS 1945 Annual Report*, 16; CBS assets from *CBS 1939 Annual Report* and *CBS 1946 Annual Report,* 44; stockholder letter from Paul Kesten, "To the Stockholder," *CBS 1943 Annual Report,* 2; all (CBS-RL).

[256]Westin quotes from Av Westin, interview by author, 10 July 2003, Richmond, MA, telephone interview, audiotape recording, (AW-OH1); CBS reporter assignments from "CBS News Assignments," CBS Press Release, 11 March 1946; CND Assignments 1944-59; (CBS-RL).

THE SEPARATE WORLDS OF CBS RADIO AND TELEVISION NEWS

Even with the impressive number of foreign bureaus and correspondents, CBS had a wealth of talent now based out of New York and Washington covering stories and commenting on the news for the radio network. Since CBS had already spent millions on television by 1946, was in the middle of a vicious fight for dominance in future television standards, and was struggling to present just four hours of original television programming a week, one obvious approach would have been to move some of the famous CBS radio names over to television. People like William Shirer, Eric Sevareid, Charles Collingwood, even Edward R. Murrow would have brought instant credibility, experience, and a good dose of celebrity to the video effort. Plus, the television crew had already come up with a fairly advanced process of mixing different visual elements into the 15 minute newscast, an effort that had won the newscast praise and honors from critics and television interest groups.

In the shorthand history of broadcast news, this is the scenario that is often given: Murrow and his boys invented broadcast journalism on radio during the war and then came home and brought that experience to television. It's a convenient narrative, but not how television news started and developed at CBS. Murrow's famous television journalistic effort, *See It Now,* didn't premiere until 1951, still five years in the future in the spring of 1946.

Instead, during the mid-to-late 1940s, most of the famous CBS news names avoided or ignored CBS-TV News. Some went further, by dismissing or deriding the programming and the medium itself. As a result, CBS-TV news developed on its own, almost as if it were a separate company. Instead of infusing the new promising medium with people who had proven their prowess on radio, CBS allowed its television news

product to be developed, shaped, refined, and led by a disparate group of people, some with news experience, some with a visual background, but few with the kind of broadcast journalism training which could be found in abundance over on the radio side. Several reasons for this division between the CBS news media existed, some practical, some financial, and some quite cavalier.

Radio Had the Power

The main reason CBS radio news people stayed away from television during these years was obvious. Radio reached millions around the country while television might be able to reach thousands, but only in the New York area. The choice between 34 million nationwide homes versus maybe eight thousand was quite clear. Most journalists and broadcasters want to reach as many people as possible and radio was the most important medium for national impact at that time.

The power of radio also meant more money. The money came from the network, from sponsors, and from the result of the commentators' celebrity status as radio stars. The top radio commentators not only made their salary from CBS, they were also paid by the sponsors of their signature newscast. During this era, advertisers still had a considerable amount of control over the content on radio. The sponsor would pay for a block of time and have a varying degree of power over what went into the broadcast. Campbell's Soup sponsored the main CBS radio newscast at 7:45 P.M. each night. When Murrow took over that broadcast in 1947, Campbell's paid him $25 hundred a week as well as up to $20 thousand a year in travel expenses. This arrangement did have its obvious problems. Critics worried about advertiser control over not only who got to present the news but maybe even the content chosen for the newscast.

The issue of advertiser control became a major CBS News controversy in 1947 and ended a long friendship between two of the most famous names in radio news. In

March, the Williams shaving cream company pulled its sponsorship of William Shirer's Sunday news broadcast in favor of other entertainment programming. CBS decided to move Shirer to another time slot. Shirer accused the network, including Murrow, of caving to an advertiser that didn't like the commentator's liberal political views. The bitter fight between Shirer and Murrow played out in the press and ended with Shirer quitting CBS and never speaking to Murrow again. Underlying the issues of free speech, advertiser control, and network autonomy though, was money. The difference between a sponsored "commercial" newscast and an unsponsored "sustaining" newscast was a dramatic drop in pay. For Shirer, it would have meant a loss of at least a thousand dollars a week. Not long after the Shirer episode, Murrow took over the 7:45 P.M. prime newscast, largely because Campbell's preferred him to Robert Trout, who had previously been doing the newscast.

Because of this system, the top commentators angled for the highest paying sponsors at the most popular hours for radio listening. In this environment, an unsponsored television newscast wouldn't even be on the radar screen for the well-known CBS commentators.[257]

Physical Distance

CBS Headquarters at 485 Madison Avenue and Grand Central Terminal may have only been ten blocks apart in mid-town Manhattan, but that distance created quite a barrier between CBS radio and television. Shirley Wershba remembers first realizing that CBS had a television station when she worked in the mail room at CBS in early 1944. "There was one corner of the mailroom that we didn't mess with because it was

[257]Campbell's arrangement from Kendrick, 301-302; Shirer episode from Edward R. Murrow, generic letter to listeners on Shirer incident, 10 April 1947; CBS News 1947 Press Releases; (CBS-RL); Mr. Perles, CBS Office Memo on Shirer Resignation, 31 March 1947; CBS News 1947 Press Releases (CBS-RL); Kendrick, 295-296; Cloud and Olson, 270-276; Sperber, 279-281

going over to television," said Wershba. "But what are they doing? Nobody sees it." Wershba quickly moved up to the news staff and worked more than four years at CBS News before she ever had any direct contact with the television news staff. Even then, in the summer of 1948, she was only asked to help on a television story because most of news staff, both radio and television, were in Philadelphia for a political convention. So Wershba went along with a film crew to interview the Prince of Wales when he arrived in New York on an ocean liner. "I thought it was exciting, it was like making movies," remembered Wershba. "And I've always been a movie fan at heart." But she didn't give any thought to working in television news, and besides, she and her husband Joe, another CBS radio news person, didn't own a set.

Back in 1941, Robert Skedgell had been so troubled by the isolation of Grand Central that he would walk back to the radio newsroom every day to stay connected with the resources available on the 17th floor as well as seek guidance from the more experienced reporters and editors. In the first year-and-a-half of the re-launched CBS TV news, the radio and television efforts were linked by common announcers. Holles, Calmer and Jackson split time both with radio and television which might have kept open some minor lines of communication. But by 1946, CBS-TV news used mostly its own commentators and that connection was broken.

The physical distance between CBS radio and TV in those early days helped cause a schism that would last for years. Even later in the 1940s, when many members of the TV news staff moved to the 17th floor at 485 Madison, Av Westin said he still noticed a divide. In the L-shaped workspace, radio had the bigger portion of the area, while television was around the corner on the short side of the "L." The divide went beyond sections of a room. "We were radio news and that's what mattered," said Westin. "And the rest of it was a joke."

Incidentally, NBC-TV news also started with the same division from radio as CBS experienced. Reuven Frank began as a writer with NBC-TV news in 1950 and the news operation was way up on 106th Street, north of Central Park, while the NBC headquarters were down at Rockefeller Center. He said the different locations resulted in little contact between the two news efforts.[258]

New and Unfamiliar Medium

Joe Wershba also worked at CBS News when the war ended. He remembers the correspondents coming back to the United States to be confronted by television. "They all hated it, they all feared it, they all despised it," said Wershba, "because it was something entirely new."

These famous war correspondents had been responsible for helping invent broadcast journalism. Not even ten years had elapsed since Murrow and Shirer had covered Hitler's march into Austria. Now, these very people honored for bringing importance to radio news had come home to be confronted by an entirely new medium, one that some are brashly suggesting might some day even eclipse radio in importance.

Even though radio involved a complicated technical process to get from the speaker to the listener, the journalist in that era didn't have to know much about the equipment. During World War II, pre-recording stories, interviews, or even battle scenes was forbidden by CBS and NBC radio, except in rare circumstances. So, for the war correspondent, the process consisted of covering the story, writing a script, getting the script approved by censors, and then reading that script into a microphone. They could work by themselves, travel where they needed to go, as long as they made it to the

[258]Wershba quotes from Shirley and Joe Wershba, interview by author, 16 August 2003, Manhasset Hills, NY, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (SJW-OH2); Westin quotes from interview, (AW-OH1); and Frank information from interview, (RF-OH2).

microphone for their pre-arranged broadcast time. One of the most often repeated tributes to Murrow is that he hired reporters, not announcers.

But in television, a journalist couldn't get away from the technology. The glaring lights, the big bulky cameras, and the whole notion of how to visualize the story was completely foreign for the radio reporters. They prided themselves on being able to paint the picture with their words, not through the use of film, graphics or animated maps. The early attempts at just reading a script into a camera had been panned and ridiculed by critics. Joe Wershba also believes some may have thinking about the fate of silent film stars when the talkies took hold. "I think they were frightened by it because if they didn't do well on television, that was the way the future beckoned, they would be out of jobs," said Wershba. "I think that was an unspoken fact."

Show Biz

One curious and common criticism of television news during this era, one that persists to this day, is that the medium itself is tainted by an entertainment bias. With this frame, radio presented real news while television offered show biz. Show biz is a term that comes up frequently when discussing the differences in news media.[259]

On the surface, the comparisons and criticisms are obvious. By merging sight and sound, television in the 1940s most reminded people of motion pictures, and people went to the movies to escape reality, to be entertained. Plus, the only attempt at presenting news at the movie theater had been the newsreel. The newsreel had a horrible reputation

[259]The entertainment or "show biz" element of television is often mentioned by Murrow and his radio news people, Cloud and Olson, 285-289; Sperber, 350-354; Kendrick, 317-334; David Schoenbrun, *On and Off the Air: An Informal History of CBS News* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1989), 52-57, Hewitt, *Tell Me a Story,* 46-49, as well as by early CBS-TV people including Hewitt, Cassirer, Westin interviews, (DH-OH2)(HC-OH)(AW-OH1), Howard Back, interview by author, 30 May 2003, Palm Desert, CA, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (HB-OH2), and John Hammerslough, interview by author, 17 August 2003, Weston, CT., videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (JH-OH2).

amongst journalists because of the emphasis on cute, visual, feature stories and an aversion to any topics that might be controversial. So if television was to become a home version of the movie theater, news wouldn't be considered a strength of the medium.

Plus, the broadcasting industry used all its political power and money to make sure television in this country wouldn't be forced to become much of an educational tool nor service for providing political information for the citizens. Industry leaders expected the government to protect their profitable licenses, but not mandate specific programming. Television businesses wanted to be free to pursue the largest possible audience in order to charge the highest amount of money possible for advertising. Therefore, the video service developed as a mass medium with an emphasis on the entertainment programming, which would generate the large audiences.

This criticism of television and its motives and results is quite valid, but doesn't hold up as well when taken back and put in the 1940s. First of all, television wasn't making any money in that decade so the profit motive certainly wasn't as strong as in radio. In 1945, 38 percent of WCBW's studio programming was devoted to news and special events while another 15 percent consisted of forums, talks and discussions. These were the top two programming areas for CBS television in that year.

These reporters and commentators who were degrading television as being "show biz" cashed their paycheck from radio. Radio wasn't exactly the educational classroom of the air in that era. Remember that radio broadcasting had virtually ignored original news reporting until World War II, in favor of soap operas, serial dramas, and popular music shows presented between and solely for advertiser pitches. Programs about issues or politics, which advertisers avoided, only appeared because in that era the FCC actually wielded some power over license renewal and could scare broadcasters into providing a little medicine along with the bags of candy.

Radio news only started to take up some room on the broadcast schedule when people demanded the information from the battle fronts. Even when radio news became a popular programming choice, the advertiser still owned the time and could wield a considerable amount of influence over how that time was used. So radio commentators ridiculing television for its show biz motives rings a bit disingenuous given the time in history.

But the show biz phrase went beyond just the entertainment emphasis of the medium. Pictures themselves came to represent something less than real news. Words were journalism, pictures were show biz, or something else just as undesirable. "I think we thought it wasn't really straight news," said Shirley Wershba. "So dependent on the pictures, it was the tail wagging the dog. You wouldn't put on a story unless you had pictures to go with it. And really these (radio news) people were all about substance rather than form." With that argument, words were facts while the pictures became the slant or bias.

Part of the early criticism of television may have also come because of radio news' tenuous position in the journalism community. Broadcast reporters, because of World War II coverage, had just begun to be tentatively accepted by their print brethren as "real" journalists. With that newfound status, the last thing they wanted was to be associated with a medium even further a field from the original printed word, seen as the true format for serious news. So radio newscasters' quick dismissal of television news sounded strangely similar to newspaper reporters' view of their own choice of medium.

Don Hewitt, who started with CBS-TV news in 1948, said he saw the radio journalists as royalty, the "adults" to television's "children." But he viewed their

resistance as pragmatic. "We were trying to find our way," said Hewitt, "and I think they were saying, let them find their way first, before we get involved in it."[260]

Taking the Lead of their Leaders

Edward R. Murrow didn't hide his view of the medium. "I wish goddamned television had never been invented," was just one of many observations he made over the years about video broadcasting. His first love would always be radio. Bob Skedgell remembers one of many network plans to change the structure of the news department. At this particular time, the idea was to split up the staff and put some solely in radio and others only in television. Skedgell says Murrow made it clear if such a division happened, he would pick the radio side. Murrow's disdain for television didn't stem from ignorance. On the contrary, he perceived the potential pitfalls and ethical issues involved with television before most people thought the medium had much potential. He once remarked, possibly after watching a government test in the late 1940s, "What seemed to concern television isn't the horror of the atom bomb, but the unique picture it makes."

It's important to note that for all the prestige Murrow brought to television through the *See It Now* series in the 1950s, he never did get involved in daily news coverage on television. In fact, one of his stipulations before getting involved with *See It Now* was that he would not be part of the CBS-TV News Department and wouldn't have to report to those people. Before *See It Now,* Murrow did a little dabbling in television, but only for special events and specific broadcasts.

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[260]Hewitt quotes from interview, (DH-OH2); Wershba quotes from interview, (SJW-OH2); Westin comments from Av Westin, interview by author, 19 August 2003, New York City, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (AW-OH2); 1945 WCBW programming from CBS, *1945 Annual Report,* 28, (CBS-RL).

One of the first areas in which Murrow and his people got pulled into television involved special events coverage. In that era, daily news broadcasts and special events coverage were considered different operations. So while the famous radio reporters would rarely come down to Grand Central for CBS-TV News, they would already be scheduled to appear at events such as political conventions, election nights, and United Nations sessions. So the television executives might be able to borrow one of the radio people to spend a little time on television as well. In one account, CBS President Frank Stanton had to practically beg Murrow and Sevareid to appear on CBS-TV coverage of the 1948 Republican political convention. But Bob Bendick believes Murrow wasn't so resistant to television. As a television manager during the late 1940s, Bendick admits Murrow wouldn't "volunteer" to work on television but that he was "fairly amenable to coming on or doing a spot" at political conventions or other events.

Even with these sporadic appearances, Murrow still didn't trust television as a legitimate news medium. David Schoenbrun said he remembered Murrow describing TV as "mindless" and a medium that would never be able to handle ideas. And Murrow's boys (and girls) followed his lead. If Murrow made fun of television, it was fair game for the rest of the reporters. Howard K. Smith said they considered television news "kind of unmanly" because it was more a performance than a news report. Schoenbrun said the CBS crew followed Murrow's lead and ignored or belittled television during that time.

Shirley Wershba remembered the radio crew dismissing the television people by referring to them as "also." The less-than-flattering term came from a popular radio (and later television) show called *The Goldbergs* which featured a forgotten uncle who came

to be known as "also." As her husband Joe remembered, CBS television news was considered "here, but not here."[261]

Murrow's Post-War Power

Paul White didn't appear to be so vocal about the shortcomings of television, but he didn't go out of his way to embrace it either. Back in 1941, he had picked one of his least experienced people, Bob Skedgell, to be the writer for the newscasts. That act was his only involvement in the pre-war broadcasts. Skedgell said he never dealt with White on any issues concerning the television newscasts during that time. During the first few years of the re-launch of CBS-TV news, White allowed his right-hand man, Everett Holles, to work both in radio and television. Plus, other popular radio commentators, Ned Calmer and Allan Jackson, also worked double duty in 1944 and 1945.

But the end of the war was about to bring a seismic shift in the power structure at CBS radio news. The headquarters at 485 Madison Avenue proved to be too small for two of the most respected men in broadcast news. Paley convinced Murrow to leave London and join the management team at CBS in New York as Vice President in charge of News and Public affairs in March 1946. This vaulted Murrow over Paul White, who had led CBS radio news since the very beginning of the network's serious news attempts. This move caused White to unravel, increasing his already heavy intake of alcohol and pills. Not even two months after Murrow moved back to New York, Paul White was gone. The end came when White insisted on personally introducing a new, important radio newscast featuring Robert Trout. But White had always been nervous talking into a

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[261] Murrow "goddamned television" quote and Smith "kind of unmanly" quote from Cloud and Olson, 287-288; Skedgell comment interview, (RS-OH2); Murrow atom bomb quote from Matusow, 49; Stanton 1948 convention incident from Cloud and Olson, 285; Bendick view from interview, (RB-OH2); Schoenbrun quotes from Schoenbrun, *On and Off The Air,* 53; Wershba comments from Shirley and Joe Wershba, interview by author, 23 April 2003, Manhasset Hills, NY, telephone interview, written notes, (SJW-OH1) and Wershba interview, (SJW-OH2).

microphone, so he spent the hours leading up to the newscast drinking, to calm his nerves. His introduction was a disaster as he was obviously drunk and hard to understand on the air. Murrow promptly fired White. Incidentally, White had just been awarded a Peabody Award for "outstanding reporting of the news" when he lost his job.

Murrow picked White's number two person in the newsroom, "Ted" Wells Church, as the new Director of News Broadcasts. Church had a long history with CBS as well as a few years as a newspaper reporter. He had also been heavily involved in the Republican National Committee.[262]

Some CBS news staffers working in the late 1940s say Church was also responsible for the anti-television feelings in the radio newsroom. As late as 1953, Av Westin actually tried to turn down a transfer from radio to television at CBS. CBS News President Sig Mickelson told Westin he would be working on a new morning show to go up against NBC's *Today Show*. Westin remembers being young, naïve and brash enough to tell his boss there wasn't any future in television. He says Mickelson's response was "How in the hell would you know?" Westin took the job and started a television journey that took him to the top of ABC News.

But Westin said his anti-TV attitude came from Church. As a new member of the CBS team, fresh out of college in 1949, Westin said the way to get ahead was to go along with the boss. "TV didn't exist as far as we were concerned," recalled Westin, "particularly in the eyes of Ted Church, a guy who denigrated TV until his final days there. Never heard him say anything good (about television.)" [263] Another CBS news person from the early 1950s, Philip Scheffler, also remembered Church's dislike of the visual medium, saying he wanted no part of TV. CBS News President Sig Mickelson

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[262]White's firing and Church's promotion from "White Resignation Announced by CBS," *Broadcasting,* 13 May 1946, 63; Kendrick, 294-295; Bliss, 184-185; Sperber, 262-265.

[263]Westin information from interview, (AW-OH2).

said Church's anti-television attitude eventually caused the network to move him out of management. Matusow argues the anti-TV news influence went far beyond the CBS staff. She says Murrow made it fashionable to "sneer at the evening news and the industry." Not only other broadcast reporters, but influential radio and television critics in the newspapers as well took the approach of belittling the journalistic efforts of the new medium.

This negative view of early television news became stamped as the accepted history of broadcast news when that frame made it into various books on the early years of broadcast news. Consider this description of 1947 television news from Murrow biographer, and former CBS foreign correspondent, Alexander Kendrick: "news broadcasting was limited to the on-camera reading of brief press bulletins, between a vocal solo and a softshoe dance." This description might fit some television news, but is quite dismissive or ignorant of the efforts going on at Kendrick's own company. The flippant description doesn't explain why Georg Olden would work on a complicated graphic involving photographs, text, and columns to visually point out the differences between the Taft-Hartley Law, the Lesinski Bill and the Wood Bill. "Brief on-camera reading" would be a surprise to Rudy Bretz who built his own contraption of wood, mirrors, maps and symbols so the news team could bring movement to stories devoid of still pictures or film. The Kendrick description wasn't fair to visualizer Chet Burger who had to find a way to keep the announcer off camera for much of a three minute analysis piece on post-war Soviet Union influence.[264]

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[264]Scheffler view on Church from Scheffler interview, (PS-OH); Mickelson comment on Church from Sig Mickelson, interview with Don Carleton, 24-25 August 1999, San Diego, CA, videotape recording, Archive of American Television, Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Foundation, (SM-OH): Matusow views on Murrow's influence from Matusow, 49; Kendrick television news description from Kendrick, 302.

Television in general, and television news specifically, did not appear on the screen in the 1940s mature and fully formed. Television pioneers tried many different approaches to both entertainment and news programming. Some ideas provided a direction for the future while others were failures. To be fair, radio broadcasters and newspaper critics weren't the only ones complaining about television programming in that era. A common critique of the medium before the post-war sets started to roll off the assembly lines was that programming advancements were lagging far behind the technological breakthroughs of visual broadcasting.

Television news appeared in many forms during the 1940s. Some efforts were "brief press bulletins," while others looked more like a theater newsreel. CBS and some other broadcasters tried to come up with a mixture of several different elements as the best way to use television for news. But because of the early dismissive view of the medium as a journalistic platform, television news wasn't allowed to have a primitive and exploratory phase. Critics at the time and later historians wouldn't cut television news any slack. Previous and future media had early stumbling attempts at bringing news to the users. Radio struggled with how to present daily news for the first two decades of its existence before World War II gave the medium a focus and a purpose. Still, historians don't refer to the radio news efforts of the 1920s and 1930s as "unmanly."

Pushing forward a few decades after television, early attempts at using a computer as a conveyor of news appear quite primitive today. But remembrances of "videotext" and early Internet journalistic sites don't include terms such as "mindless." Instead, the people behind those efforts are often portrayed as pioneers and visionaries. Their contributions are considered bold steps in a new arena. Yet the pioneers of early television news and their efforts have mostly been locked into an unfair portrayal of impotence and irrelevance, mostly because of the influence and views of Murrow and his

followers and the unconscious tendency to compare an embryonic television industry to the seasoned and matured radio efforts of that time.

Radio's Indifference Creates Television Opportunities

Chet Burger said he realized why the "big people" avoided television. Burger said the TV crew referred to the famous radio commentators as the "big people." At the time, the television audience was small and so was the CBS-TV news staff. "Collingwood, Larry LeSueur, Winston Burdett and Hottelet and all the others…they had name recognition," said Burger. "We had nothing. Consequently they wouldn't go near us. Absolutely wouldn't go near us." Burger worked with CBS-TV news for more than eight and a half years. He was known as one of the veterans of the effort and worked his way up to assignment editor, but he's not sure Murrow ever knew he existed. The radio news people he did know were never rude to the television personnel, but he found them to be friendly in more of a patronizing way.

Henry Cassirer had a unique vantage point since he had spent years in the radio newsroom as part of the shortwave listening station before moving over to television. He said the television crew was considered "nobody" at CBS mainly because of the small audience and lack of advertising. "Who counts? How many people can you get to listen? We were significant perhaps then but (only) as an interesting feature of what may come," he remembered. "The money came from radio and really everything goes back to money and we didn't make money, we cost money for CBS."

Bob Bendick recalled the radio people didn't have a high opinion of television at the time. But he saw it more as a reaction to an unfamiliar format. "They thought we were newcomers on the block and really didn't have much talent," said Bendick. "Their medium was so flexible and television was so inflexible for them that they really didn't feel at home with it."

But the small CBS television crew treated the radio indifference as an opportunity instead of a slight. "If the big people—Ed Murrow's crew—had thought that television news was anything, we wouldn't have had a chance," reasoned Burger. "They would have moved right into it. The reason we had a chance was they wouldn't touch television." Over at NBC, Reuven Frank, got into television because of the same type of attitude at that network. With only a few years of newspaper experience, Frank asked why he was hired over the much more experienced radio news people. "NBC is a big established international news organization," Frank remembered the NBC executive telling him, "and he said 'nobody's who's any good in radio will come up here because they don't think it'll last.'"

So with the famous names and experienced journalists in radio news sticking with their first love and ignoring the potential of the new medium, television became the playground of a new group of news pioneers. At CBS, the door opened for people like Henry Cassirer, Bob Bendick, Chester Burger, Georg Olden, Rudy Bretz, Don Hewitt, Larry Racies and others to bring together their wide variety of experiences and start solving the problems and exploring the potential of news on television. "I think there was not a soul in it who didn't have an enormous enthusiasm and intellectual commitment to the fact that this was going to be a huge impact medium," recalled Bendick. "We didn't realize how big, and we didn't realize in what direction it was going in particularly, (but) we had a great faith in it." [265]

TAPPING INTO WARTIME EXPERIENCE

During another period in history, the CBS radio personnel's dismissal of television might have had a greater effect on the development of television news. But

[265]Burger, Cassirer and Bendick quotes from interviews, (CB-OH1),(HC-OH),(RB-OH1/2).

CBS-TV instead could tap into people with a different kind of experience. World War II veterans came flooding back to the United States, either looking for their old jobs or exploring a new direction inspired by their wartime experience. Military service could have involved world travel, life and death experiences on the battle front, intense training in a new technology or continuation in a career already selected before the war. In many cases, the veterans' experiences would be a combination of the above as well as a more seasoned view of this country and its place in the world. Television news benefited from hitting its critical formative years just as the workforce transformed into a much more experienced, mature, and critical group of people than would normally be expected from high school or college graduates.

This unique work force did also create challenges in postwar work environments. Veterans came home from the war with a sense of entitlement. They had spent the previous few years away from home, often in dangerous, life-threatening situations. They had watched friends die, or maybe had to kill people themselves. At the very least, they had lost some of the most productive years of their lives helping the country in a time of crisis. These people had been told they were heroes, that they were saving the world for democracy, and that they were fighting for the American way of life. So when they returned, veterans had expectations from their country and their employer.

In television, the most obvious area that benefited from war time experience was in engineering. Most television engineers had switched right from station work to war projects. The experience they gained and the breakthroughs they made would go directly into improving postwar television cameras, transmitters, receivers, and so many other pieces of equipment that would become important in advancing the medium.

For CBS-TV news, the operation inherited a group of people with a wide-ranging set of experiences during the war. Each person brought his or her perspective of news and the world, colored by years of widespread conflict.

Chet Burger certainly benefited from his military years. He started at CBS as a page in 1941. Later he was promoted to working the overnight shift when the government asked CBS to keep its radio station running all night. His experiences in the army, first by helping the recruits understand the scope and meaning of the war, and then by working on an experimental television broadcast, helped position him to fit into the television news department when he was released.

Larry Racies continued his radio technician experience during his time in the service. He helped run radio programs on a base in Louisiana as well as working with still photography and sound mixings as well. He was able to turn his military service into motion picture experience by talking himself into the First Motion Picture Unit of the Army Air Corps in Hollywood. Bob Skedgell, the original television news writer, continued his journalism training in the service, but in a different medium. Skedgell spent the war working the overnight shift at an army airfield base newspaper in Nevada, next to a bombing range.

Don Hewitt, who would join the TV effort in 1948, used the war to further his dream of becoming a journalist. Hewitt had been working for the New York *Herald-Tribune* as a copy boy when he joined the Merchant Marines. On his first trip to Europe as part of a North Atlantic convoy, German subs sank almost all of the boats in the fleet. When he arrived in London, he decided to push for a different war experience. Somehow, Hewitt was able to talk himself into a coveted job as a war correspondent for the *Star and Stripes,* the top paper for the U.S. Armed Forces. Hewitt said the war

experiences have stayed with him the rest of his life. "It shaped my values, my sense of right and wrong, and it quickened my pulse to be a reporter."[266]

World War II certainly changed Bob Bendick's career objectives. Bendick had worked as a cameraman on the original CBS television efforts under Gilbert Seldes before the war. With that experience, he signed up for the 10th Combat Camera Air Corps. He was still using a camera, but the scenes had become a bit more dangerous than waves crashing into the beach or a Richard Hubbell newscast. Bendick was now shooting film of bombing raids. His pictures would be used for the newsreels, for the military, and for evidence of how effective a bombing mission had been. "It was our job to cover all bombs or bomb results," said Bendick. "Sometimes we'd go back to place we had bombed, and we'd match the bombs descending to what was actual damage done, (such as) bridges, railroads, etcetera." As a film photographer on a bombing mission, Bendick was also responsible for a machine gun in the belly of the plane. "(It was a) tough decision, whether to use the gun or the camera," he remembered with a smile. "(I) usually stuck to the camera because I couldn't hit a bull's eye."

In addition to the combat work, Bendick said he received a tremendous education by visiting places like China, Burma and India during his time in the service. Overall, Bendick sensed he wouldn't be content going back to his old job at CBS. "(T)hings had changed so much and my experience had broadened so much that in terms of evaluating all kinds of situations that I really wasn't all that interested in camerawork."

Bendick turned his World War II work into a quick succession of promotions at CBS Television. When he returned to WCBW-TV in December 1945, the former cameraman was named Director of Special Events. He was put in charge of the live remotes which CBS just started to broadcast at the start of 1946 when the mobile camera

[266]Hewitt, *Tell Me a Story,* 37.

was finally put in service. Six months later, in August 1946, Bendick was named Director of News and Special Events when Leo Hurwitz quit the station to work on a feature film. Bendick was now in charge of all newscasts as well as the live broadcasts presented on the station.

The infusion of war veterans wasn't without its problems. The combination of returning service men and women and the people who had been doing the work during the war years sometimes resulted in tension in the work place. Larry Racies remembers his group calling all the people who didn't go into military service "nummys" which was short for the unflattering term "numb nuts." He said the resentment came from the people who got ahead through promotions while the rest of the staff was off fighting the war. Bendick said the tension often came when the returning veteran displaced someone who had been working at the job previously. "It wasn't a friendly feeling… Some stayed, but I guess we were better than they were," he said with a bit of a laugh.

By law, a company was supposed to offer the returning worker a comparable job at the same wage he or she left behind when joining the service. But that distinction didn't sit well with many veterans since they felt their years in the war and the experience they had gained should put them in a higher position than what they were doing when they left. After being a war correspondent for *Stars and Stripes,* Hewitt wasn't very thrilled about returning as a copy boy for the New York *Herald-Tribune* for $25 a week. Instead he turned down the guaranteed job and became the night editor for the Associated Press in Memphis, Tennessee.

In Dallas, Texas, Gordon Yoder had to go to his draft board to force his old boss to take him back after the war. Yoder had been working for Paramount as a newsreel photographer at $70 for two days' work a week. When he got out of the service, the

newsreel company said it didn't have the money to pay him anymore. But after the draft board got in touch with Paramount, Yoder had his old job back, at least for a while.

Chet Burger couldn't believe what CBS had in mind for him after his Army service. When he left in 1942, he had been doing some administrative work for a CBS shortwave broadcasting service to Latin America. After the war, that service was shut down, so CBS had to find him a comparable position. The CBS Personnel Department told him the only job available for his rate of $27.50 a week was as a mimeograph operator. "I said no thank you, and I told them to go to hell and I walked out," said Burger. "I deliberately signed away my rights to re-employment."

A month later, Joe Wershba of CBS radio told Burger to go see Henry Cassirer at WCBW-TV. Even after Cassirer decided to hire Burger at the $40-a-week position of "visualizer", CBS Personnel stepped in and said he shouldn't receive any more than $27.50. Cassirer fought for Burger and was able to get the network to change its mind on the salary. But Burger said this experience mirrored what was happening to veterans at jobs all around the country. "…It embittered me against management at the time, and I would say most of the returning vets were very, very bitter towards management," reflected Burger. "It was a very, very profound sense of disillusionment after the hopes we had had that the company would treat us nicely."

From the company perspective, the end of the conflict and the returning veterans meant a substantial increase in money spent on salaries. During the war, companies were able to keep down raises because of wage stabilization measures enacted as part of the overall war production effort. But in the postwar period, employees expected to make up the lost wages and often turned to unions for help in bettering their situation. By March

1947, Columbia had 65 wage and benefit agreements with 44 separate locals representing 14 different international labor unions.[267]

CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING NEWS

The end of the war meant not just a radical change of priorities for the nation, but for the news media as well. War news had filled the newspaper pages, the radio airwaves, and even the television newscasts for the first half of the 1940s. Now, journalists began to struggle with what to cover and how much to offer in the postwar environment. Radio and television had the biggest news identity questions since both media had found their niche covering the world conflict. For CBS-TV, the transition caused a subtle but dramatic change from a global newscast to a presentation that more closely mirrored a modern local television newscast.

The Three Alarm Fire is a Story Again

Would people still listen to news on the radio after the war ended? That was the big question dogging network executives, radio station owners, and broadcast journalists. Networks and stations only devoted about five percent of their broadcast day to news before Hitler became a threat beyond Germany, but that number had jumped to 20 percent during the war. What stories are important enough to be included in the newscast now that our troops are coming home? Will enough people listen to keep the newscasts profitable to the stations and networks? These questions were constantly being debated and analyzed after V-J Day in August 1945.

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[267]CBS unions from William S. Paley, "To the Stockholders," *CBS 1946 Annual Report,* 12, (CBS-RL); Burger quotes from interview, (CB-OH2); Yoder information from Gordon Yoder, interview by author, 26 August 2003, Dallas TX, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (GY-OH); Hewitt postwar offer from Hewitt, *Tell Me a Story,* 40; Bendick, Racies, and Skedgell information from interviews, (RB-OH1/2), (LR-OH2), (RS-OH1/2).

For the main networks that had invested in such a heavy staff of foreign correspondents, international news would remain a key part of the news coverage for many years to come. CBS boasted in 1947 that it had a larger and more far-reaching system of international reporters and bureaus than during the war itself. For the true foreign correspondent, the plum job was still in Paris or Rome, instead of Chicago or Los Angeles.

Local radio stations had a tougher choice to make. Many of them had never invested in much of a news staff. During the war, people wanted to know the latest battle news. So the local stations could rely on their networks for much of the coverage and then use their local announcers to read the latest information from the news wires. But if news was now to become more local or regional in nature, those stations would have to invest in reporters to go out and cover those stories.

William Gold, the News Editor for WINX radio in Washington D.C. in 1945 warned the size of the post-war radio news audience would depend on how well journalists did their jobs: "In the war days, the news was so tremendous that practically any kind of reporting 'got by.' Now we're getting back to a more normal diet, and our sense of values is slowly being restored. The three-alarm fire is making the front page. again." In Cincinnati, WKRC News Editor Tom McCarthy said the lack of war news would force stations look at their own communities: "Local news, generally slighted by individual stations, will come into its own as soon as the radio industry discovers what newspapermen know—that the man next door is a lot more important than any three out-of-state senators."

In Macon, Georgia, the General Manager of WMAZ started an experiment in local news even before the war ended. Wilton Cobb couldn't find any experienced radio news people because of the war, so he set about training the people who already worked

at the station. He relied on his experience at the *Macon Telegraph* newspaper in the 1920s to set up a system of reporters and specific beats. The local news was presented on three different newscasts during the day. Cobb wouldn't allow the newscasts to be sponsored so they would be perceived as the front page of a newspaper. He considered the expense as a public service to the community. After the first four months of the local news experiment, Cobb said "the reception by the public was the most enthusiastic of anything we have ever done."[268]

Paul White also had advice for his former colleagues. He chided the famous war correspondents and the rip-and-read radio announcers by telling them it was time to rediscover the United States:

> News was not only B-29 raids on enemy targets, news not only atomic fission, but also a blizzard in Buffalo, a kidnaped child in Chicago, a mine disaster in Kentucky, floods in Missouri and Illinois. News was the prices of what we buy and our take-home pay and stockholders' dividends.[269]

Broadcasters had good reason to try and keep listeners interested in news programming even after the fighting ended. In the spring of 1945, the Katz Agency polled more than 4500 people around the country about their news preferences. Nine out of ten people surveyed said they listened to at least two news broadcasts on the radio every day. When respondents were asked "What do you depend upon most for your news?," more than 56 percent picked radio while 36 percent chose newspapers and only 6 percent picked magazines.[270]

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[268]radio station news experiences from "End of War Puts Emphasis on Local News," *Broadcasting,* 1 October 1945, 23; and "Radio Can Hold Its Wartime Gains," *Broadcasting,* 3 September 1945, 15.

[269]White, *News on the Air,* 368.

[270]Eugene Katz, "How Often Do They Listen To News?" *Broadcasting,* 8 October 1945, 26.

TV News Tools and Approach Based on War Coverage Needs

With only about eight-thousand television sets in the entire country, the audience for television news didn't need to be polled. It was much too small. But for WCBW-TV, the choice of stories was quite clear in the early years. Both Bob Skedgell in 1941 and Henry Cassirer in 1944 spent most of their efforts on war coverage. The main reason for the emphasis was of course, national interest in the war. But news resources and technological concerns also reinforced those content choices. With the end of the war also came a slow evolution of equipment available for news coverage as well as added resources and staff. At the very time the staff was most concerned about choosing stories in the postwar environment, the crew had more options at its disposal. Using Cassirer's period writing on the CBS-TV efforts as well as scripts, rundowns, and the views of the people involved in those early newscasts, the news content clearly evolves from a war-centered program to more of a mix of international news and information important to the local viewers.

During the 1944-1945 period, most of the news centered on the war, for obvious reasons and with little discussion of any other approach. Cassirer talked himself onto the staff because of his concern for war maps. He pushed for Olden to be hired so someone would be able to draw maps and build graphics to visualize the battles and strategy. Cassirer also hired Burger because of his awareness of the importance of clear visuals when discussing the war.

Since Cassirer was writing about television news during this very period, his articles give today's reader a clear idea of the main emphasis on these newscasts. Here is his example on creatively visualizing a story: "When the tank symbol on the map moves for instance, to Debrecen in Hungary and clashes there with a German tank, a dissolve brings the picture of Russian tanks in action on the screen." When explaining what an

early television viewer would see on a newscast, war is again the topic: "The latest pictures from France, radio photos[271] hardly a day old, put you on the spot… While one camera picks up these slides, another is focused on the man-size map of France. (Everett) Holles switches his commentary from the pictures to the actual fighting and the map appears on the screen. The battle line is clearly marked and a pointer helps you pick out the places which allied armies have captured or which are the next objective."

The coverage of the war and the visualization tools created for WCBW's newscasts became so intertwined, the two were hard to separate, even after the war. In November 1945, three months after V-J Day, Cassirer was pitching an article on television news to King Features syndicate. Even with the war months in the past, Cassirer still reverted back to battle examples to illustrate the strengths and potential of visual news:

> Reports from Okinawa are introduced by two maps, one showing the position of Okinawa in the Pacific battle zone, and super-imposed it the actual battle line of the island appears on the screen. The latest news reels flown in from the Pacific help us visualize the actual fighting. The Chinese have swung into action. An animated map shows the latest Chinese thrust and the threat to key Japanese communication lines.[272]

The reliance on war examples to explain early visualization techniques is understandable. The WCBW-TV crew, both in 1941 and then again in 1944, had to create a format and a presentation for television news when war was the overwhelming story. Most of their early successes in visualization came as a result of experimenting with ways to show a battle when film of the conflict was rare and if available, dated.

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[271]radio photo refers to a method of transferring wire service photographs. The method was first called telephotography, which became known as "wirephotos" when AP started offering the service through phone lines in 1935. During World War II, quicker methods using cable and radio helped bring the pictures to the United States even quicker, Mott, 682.

[272]Cassirer various quotes: "tank symbol" from Cassirer, "Telecasting the News," 13, "latest pictures" from Dr. Henry Cassirer, "See The News With Television," unpublished manuscript; Notes RE: TV News 1 of 3; (HC-CAH); "reports from Okinawa" from Henry Cassirer, "Television Reports the News," unpublished manuscript; Television; (HC-CAH).

Postwar Evolution of Content

But as the war receded further into the past, the CBS-TV crew started to discover its own community, similar to the experiences at radio stations around the country. The news people turned their visualization efforts from tanks, bombs and battlefronts, to strategies for covering news events or feature stories in New York City or the area. The daily successes evolved from a moving map to fit a late-breaking war story to shooting an afternoon event in the city and having it ready for that night's news.

In Cassirer's writings on early television news, the shift from war to New York visualization efforts is striking. A selling point of television as a news medium becomes the immediacy of local filmed stories. Cassirer wrote about a two-alarm afternoon fire in a crowded tenement district of Manhattan: "Our cameramen grabbed their equipment, rushed to the scene and came back with a first class story that was shown on the air at 8 o'clock that evening, sound effects, commentary, music and all." In another manuscript, the timely story is a local labor dispute: "Crowds jamming the streets and gazing up to their lofty offices were shown on CBS Television the same day that the elevator strike hit New York City." Another time, the story is an afternoon American Legion parade which is shot and edited for use on the same day.

Timeliness and picture possibilities weren't the only reasons to trumpet the local coverage. In his later efforts to stress the importance of mixing visual elements within a story, the topics chosen seemed worlds away from earlier war examples. The introduction of a bill to develop the St. Lawrence Seaway is used as an example of television visualization: "you might start off by showing a map of the St. Lawrence and the Great Lakes region. You can then trace through animation devices or through simple pointing the course of the proposed shipping way, and spot Massena where a power station is to be erected." The transformation into a local station had definitely taken hold

when Cassirer described a feature story on a fishing trip from Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn: the story "became much more meaningful to our audience due to the fact that we dissolved in and out of animated map which showed how to get to the boat and where the party stopped to catch its shark and fluke."[273]

CBS-TV news didn't drop national and international news and run solely with New York area news. But the transformation from a heavy emphasis on war visualization to a New York local news effort was quite dramatic in a short period of time, roughly from 1945 to 1948. Cassirer came into the television effort with a strong interest in the war and world events. A few years later, he had also embraced the role of a television station in its community:

> Television News is in a position to bring to the local audience the pictures which are of interest to it but are necessarily suppressed by companies producing for a national market. Television broadcasts at the present stage are local, or at best regional broadcasts, and Television camera stories can easily be shaped to the taste of this local audience. Even if Television networks should span the country, the possibility of presenting reports of a local color is a high selling point of this new medium of communication.[274]

FACTORS AFFECTING CBS-TV NEWS DIRECTION AND CONTENT

CBS-TV didn't operate in a vacuum. The content and direction of the news effort had several influences. Some of the influences came over from the radio newsroom and involved story selection processes and reliance on specific sources. Individual members of the news team also brought their background and experiences to the effort. In

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[273]St Lawrence and parade examples from Henry Cassirer, "Television News is Different," unpublished manuscript; Notes Re: TV News #1; (HC-CAH); fishing trip and tenement fire from Henry Cassirer, "The Camera Eye Reports The News," unpublished manuscript; Notes Re: TV News #1; (HC-CAH); elevator strike from Henry Cassirer, "News on Television," unpublished manuscript; Miscellaneous photo, articles, notes; (HC-CAH).

[274]Cassirer, "The Camera Eye Reports the News."

addition, advances in technology and availability of equipment played a role in shaping CBS-TV news during the mid-1940s.

Network News, Without the Network

Both Bob Skedgell in 1941 and Henry Cassirer in 1944 came to WCBW-TV after spending years at CBS radio news. Skedgell had trained under the experienced radio news staff at 485 Madison Avenue. Henry Cassirer spent several years working in the newsroom as a member of the shortwave listening station staff. Neither man had ever taken a journalism class in school. Both of them pointed to their time on the 17th floor of CBS Headquarters as their journalistic education.

So when they moved over to television, they took part of the CBS radio news model with them. Never mind that CBS radio included affiliates around the country and broadcast to millions of people while WCBW-TV reached maybe a few thousand in the New York City area, the news would be chosen based on their experiences with the network radio news department. Cassirer admitted that news to him meant national or international events when he moved over to television. "We thought of ourselves as a national station with a local audience," said Cassirer. "But we didn't really think very locally. We didn't think New York." The distinction between local and world news didn't inspire much debate during World War II. War news was international, national and local. Everyone wanted the latest information from the battle fronts. So a New York newscast based on a network audience model wouldn't appear out of the ordinary during this era.

War news and international coverage also matched the background of many of the early television news people. For Cassirer, the importance of those stories was obvious. World War II had broken apart his family and had forced him to flee two different countries in search of a safe place to live. Plus, he desperately wanted to see the Nazis

crushed for what Hitler and his people had done to his homeland. For Cassirer, World War II was local news. Bob Bendick also had a personal view of the war, with his position as an aerial combat film photographer. While Burger and Racies never left the United States, they had spent years in military service and played a role in the war effort. So the concentration on war news and international coverage after the conflict would be natural for people who had been so close to the war effort.

Reliance on Wire Services

One of the main reasons why WCBW-TV news had such a heavy dose of war news and international coverage was the almost total reliance on the wire services for news in the early years. Once again, the importance of the news services came from the CBS radio news model. The CBS foreign correspondents may have received most of the attention during the war years, but most of the others news that filled out the CBS newscasts came from the various wire services, including AP, UP, and INS.

In fact, the apprenticeship period at CBS News involved mostly rewriting wire copy and learning how to pick the best stories from the various news services. Shirley Wershba said she learned news judgment this way from editor Jesse Zousmer, who later became one of Edward R. Murrow's writers. "I sat across the desk from him and he would comment as he read the news and I would comment and we got along very, very well," remembered Wershba. "And I always felt that I learned everything I know about real journalism from Jesse Zousmer." Wershba then became an early writing mentor for Av Westin, when he started at CBS. A decade later, in the early 1950s, Philip Scheffler became indoctrinated in CBS News the same way. He would rewrite wire copy and then

let an editor like Ed Bliss or Dallas Townsend critique his work. "It was a good thing," said Scheffler. "That's how you learned. You apprenticed."[275]

For Cassirer, the trust of and reliance on wire service news was almost complete. He said his goal was to mirror the Associated Press wire service as closely as possible. "There were the other agencies, UP and INS, but you don't have too much time on a newscast to cover so many stories, and the top stories were on all the wires." Cassirer said he would read the newspapers and listen to radio news, but for the most part, the story selection and order of the WCBW newscasts would closely match the agenda of the wire services.

Cassirer's heavy use of wire copy was not a unique approach. All across the country, radio stations and newspapers relied on the wire services for the bulk of their coverage. And in any event, the television crew didn't have much choice. In the early years, WCBW didn't have the personnel or resources to rely on other methods for digging out stories.

Little Original Reporting on Television

One of the strongest criticisms of early television news involves the lack of original reporting on the medium. Television is guilty as charged on that count. Most of early television news involved rewriting wire copy or providing context for available news film. TV newscasts didn't break a lot of big stories in the early years. Much like other emerging news media of the 20th century, such as radio and the Internet, the effort in the early years of television news concentrated on capitalizing on the unique characteristics of the medium without investing as much in developing original stories.

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[275]Scheffler quote from Philip Scheffler, interview by author, 13 August 2003, New York City, videotape recording, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin, (PS-OH); Wershba quote from interview, (SJW-OH2).

The main issue was money. The owners of television stations didn't want to invest in a costly team of reporters and photographers until the medium proved to be a popular source for news. Plus, the manpower and equipment needed for a basic television newscast, without reporters and photographers, was still exponentially more expensive than a radio news effort. In radio, a reporter/announcer and a sound engineer could handle a newscast, with a board engineer keeping track of the station.

In television, even if the news team only consisted of a writer and a commentator, those two people were just the beginning of the staff needed to present the newscast. You might need a couple of artists to build the graphics for the newscast. If you shoot any of your own stories, you need film photographers and film editors. Then, the newscast itself would require a couple of studio camera people, a floor director, an audio person, a director, a producer, a film projectionist, as well as other crew members. This scenario only accounts for the people, and not all of the expensive equipment needed to capture this newscast and send it out to the audience.

So television stations needed a large workforce and expensive equipment even before investing in its own reporting and photography crews. Plus, the work of the television news "editor" required not just coming up with the words for the story, but also ways to visualize those stories. Therefore, those people usually couldn't afford to leave the building to cover any stories. Henry Cassirer never left WCBW to cover a story for a newscast. Over at NBC, Reuven Frank, who was hired as a writer in 1950, also never worked on original reporting outside of the station.

Even years later, in the mid-1950s when Av Westin made the transition from radio to television at CBS, he said the journalism part of television news wasn't paramount to the effort. "We were so busy collecting the visual material or editing the visual material," said Westin, "that there was very little enterprise journalism."

Once again, it's important to separate daily news coverage from special event coverage when describing early television news. For a special event, such as a political convention, a United Nations session, or an atomic bomb test, reporters would appear on television and provide original information. Usually those reporters came from the radio side of CBS. But those same reporters would not be responsible for writing or reporting stories on television on a regular basis. On occasion, foreign correspondents would do the television crew a favor by stopping by Grand Central Terminal studios to be interviewed about their experiences covering other countries. WCBW featured Ned Calmer for 15 minutes in January 1945 so he could talk about his coverage of the Western and Italian fronts during the war. Douglas Edwards made his first appearance on CBS-TV news to talk about his time overseas covering stories for CBS radio.

To put the video effort in context, in the mid- to late-1940s, most of CBS radio news original reporting fell to the foreign correspondents. The network had a stable of important commentators and announcers in New York and Washington, but many of those people concentrated on analysis of the top national and international stories. Joe Wershba noticed the distinction when he was hired by CBS radio news. He wanted to be a reporter, but he noticed most of the jobs would be best described as "writers of news." His early years at CBS involved that kind of work. "There wasn't much reporting," remembered Wershba. "You were given wire copy… and you had to put all these stories together, and it was type, type, type, and you had to be accurate about it."[276]

Concerning the lack of original reporting, television news developed in a similar pattern to other news media. Both radio in the early 1900s and the Internet at the end of the century started as vehicles for repurposing news from other sources. Radio was so dependent on other sources for news that newspaper publishers felt they could kill

[276]Westin quote from interview, (AW-OH1); Wershba quote from interview, (SJW-OH2).

broadcast news by cutting off wire service access in 1933. Only then did radio reporters start picking up the phone and generating their own stories or at least verifying facts from other sources.

Internet news started as a new format for presentation of information gathered by other media. Very few organizations invested in reporters and photographers exclusively for news Web sites. The industry started to develop original news content just before the tech bust hit at the start of the 21st Century. Now, for the most part, the Internet still relies on other sources for the majority of its news content.

To take the argument back even further, the reporter didn't become an important part of newspaper content until the latter half of the 19th Century. In the early half of the 1800s, many papers were content with clipping articles from other papers, printing verbatim speeches, and publishing lists from various government agencies or business concerns.

Film Photographers Provide Visual Local News

As CBS-TV news evolved from war coverage to a greater emphasis on local stories, the film photographer took on an added significance to the process. CBS had never totally ignored the potential of shooting film of stories in New York. Edward Anhalt and Bob Bendick had provided film of some big events during the early years. Larry Racies had used his newsreel experience to convince the crew to let him shoot scenes of V-E Day in 1945. But the early efforts appeared to be often at the initiative of the photographer and then the resulting film was worked into the news coverage. Gradually, local news film became an important element of the newscast on a more regular basis. The film of a New York City tenement fire added the visual flair that used to be reserved for the animated map.

Adding local newsfilm to a television newscast wasn't a simple act. First, the news department had to have enough technical people on staff that at least one photographer could be assigned to film local stories. The photographer would have to be given enough time to get to the event and film the necessary scenes. Then the film needed to be sent to a lab for processing. After the film was developed, someone would have to look at the pictures and decide what shots would be used, how long the various shots would last, and the order of the pictures. Then a film editor would have to cut and splice the film in the necessary order and length. At the same time, a writer had to be responsible for crafting a script that would correctly match the pictures in the order and length they were edited.

Because of all of the steps involved in getting film on the air, the stations started to pride themselves on how quickly they could turn around film for a newscast. In Cassirer's writings, he applauds the news effort of being able to film afternoon events such as a fire, an elevator strike, or a parade and still have those pictures available for a newscast just a few hours later. The speed of shooting, processing, and presenting film quickly became a television news bragging point, much like a newspaper scoop. In July 1946, WNBT boasted of the first showing of film from two separate atom bomb tests in the Bikini Atoll.

In 1948, another New York station took the competition for first pictures to a new level. When WPIX-TV, the video side of the New York *Daily News,* signed on, its slogan screamed "First on Scene, First on Screen." WPIX is also credited with coining the television term, "film at eleven." [277]

[277]WNBT scoop from "Second A-Bomb Films, *Broadcasting,* 5 August 1946, 66; WPIX information from WPIX advertisement, *Broadcasting,* 24 May 1948, p. 39; Allen, *News is People,* 6.

Birth of the Television News Reporter

Since WCBW didn't have the budget to hire a staff of reporters in this era of television news, the concept of a television news reporter evolved slowly. Trying to pin a "first" on anything in television is problematic and just aching to be challenged, but Chet Burger would have a pretty good case as one of television's first reporters. He fell into that role because of his knowledge of the city as well as his loosely-defined job of "visualizer." As WCBW relied more heavily on local film for the newscast, Cassirer said it was natural to send Burger out with the camera crew. "There, his own background in New York, meant a lot to the team," said Cassirer. "He brought something that the others didn't bring." Because of the size of the staff, working on location with a film crew was only a part of Burger's responsibilities. "We were so small that there wasn't a distinction between my role say out on the street as a reporter than my role back in the office writing copy or editing or figuring out a visualization," remembered Burger. "We all worked very much as a collaborative I would say."

Focusing on his work in the field, Burger said in the beginning the film was silent so he would stay out of the way of the photographer and take notes for the script. When CBS started using sound cameras, he became responsible for asking the questions during filmed interviews. "The qualification that I had only was the fact that I followed the news," said Burger. "I kept myself well informed and that gave me the advantage that I could ask intelligent questions without reading from a script."

For the most part, CBS wasn't breaking important stories or doing investigative work with these early film stories. Burger remembers one of his more regular assignments was to meet the big ocean liners as they arrived in New York. In this era before trans-Atlantic flights became popular, many celebrities and important people traveled to and from Europe by boat. Early in the morning, Burger would arrive at Pier 9

on the East River. "We'd board the Coast Guard cutter, go out in the bay and wait in the dark for the Queen Mary or Elizabeth to come out of the fog, in the pre-dawn, always very dramatic and marvelously exciting for me." Once on board, the ship officials would give him a list of important people on board and their cabin numbers. Burger would knock on their doors and ask if they wouldn't mind stepping up on deck for an interview. If they agreed, he'd lead them up to a platform where all of the newsreel and television photographers were lined up, ready to roll film.

Burger said he rarely appeared on camera, instead his reporting duties consisted of picking the interview clips and writing the script for the news commentator. While the celebrity interviews might not have had a New York angle, most of Burger's other work with the film crews in the New York City area provided more local content to the CBS-TV newscast in the postwar era.[278]

The Contact Man

Burger's experiences on the ocean liners came straight from newsreel tradition. For decades, newsreel photographers had been filming and interviewing famous people as they embarked or arrived on the ocean liners. And the early television reporting work Burger carried out for WCBW also had its origin in newsreels.

The newsreels didn't use the term reporter, instead the people working with the camera crew were known as "contact men." Five years after Burger started with CBS-TV, Howard Back was hired as a contact man for *Telenews* in New York. *Telenews* was a newsreel company that shot film for CBS and other television stations. Even by 1951, when Back started covering stories for *Telenews,* he said there weren't many reporters or contact people. "If we went out on a story and there was another crew or two there, it might have been a crew from NBC because they were early," said Back. "People in those

[278]Cassirer quote from interview, (HC-OH); Burger quote from interview, (CB-OH2).

jobs largely had been contact people for the old newsreel and there were only a handful of them, six or eight, probably in all of New York at that point."

Back said his job as contact man involved going out with newsreel crews and giving them guidance on the news aspect of the story. He said the crews didn't need any help on photography since they were veteran newsreel photographers, but they didn't consider themselves news people. Plus, Back only accompanied a crew on a story if it involved an interview. He would be responsible for asking the questions. If the photographer was shooting silent film or if the event included a prepared speech, the crew didn't need a contact person involved. In the *Telenews* system, Back's responsibilities ended when the film returned to the office. Other people would be responsible for viewing, selecting and editing the film as well as writing a script to match the pictures.[279]

TELEVISION COMES OFF THE ROPES

In the summer of 1946, television needed a shot in the arm. Once again, David Sarnoff and RCA turned to the knockout punch. The broadcasting pioneer regenerated interest in the visual medium, using the same trick that worked so well for radio more than a quarter-century previously.

Postwar Uncertainty

Television wasn't the only question mark during the first years after the war. American society itself was on the move, searching for opportunities and that better life that was supposed to materialize when the enemies were defeated. But many returning veterans felt their years of service should be worth something, and were insulted by the

[279]Back quotes from interview, (HB-OH2).

jobs waiting for them when they returned. Chet Burger wasn't the only one who was disillusioned with his company when he came out of the service. Plus, many veterans didn't have a guaranteed job waiting, and they had to fight for limited positions as the American economy gradually shifted from war to a peacetime status. Even finding a place to live became a serious issue after the war. Since all of the manufacturing efforts had focused on the war for years, not enough new homes and apartments had been built to handle major influx of men and women returning to the United States.

The fight for jobs and the lack of housing put Americans on the move. Between V-J Day in August 1945 and October 1946, roughly one out of every thirteen people in the country moved. Some only traveled to a nearby county, but at least half settled in a new state. Of the 10.7 million people migrating to new locations, the largest percentage was between the ages of 20 and 29. Most of these people were either looking for a new job or moving to one. The second biggest reason for packing up and heading out involved the lack of housing in the area they left behind. Once these people got to where they were going, the next order of business was to start a family. The census bureau reported that the birthrate in this country more than doubled in the second half of 1946 when compared to the first six months.[280]

The housing shortage not only affected the returning veterans, but the fledgling television industry as well. Even for companies that were eager to start up a VHF black-and-white operation, a major stumbling block became construction. Under laws passed to deal with the housing crisis, the first priority of the building industry was to work on houses and apartments so people would have somewhere to live. Constructing a television station or even a transmitter tower didn't fit into the hierarchy of needs. Plus,

[280]"Census Report Shows 10,700,000 Persons Have Changed Location Since V-J Day," *Broadcasting,* 13 October 1947, 66.

the broadcast manufacturing companies still hadn't been able to turn out new transmitters, cameras or other necessary equipment, so the new stations would have to wait.

In addition, the optimism that television would burst upon the American scene as one of the first major successes of the postwar economy had started to fade. By mid-1946, dealers still had no television sets to sell and manufacturers kept pushing back the date when the assembly lines would be rolling. Plus the fight over color television had caused many to question the wisdom of investing hundreds of thousands of dollars in a black-and-white signal that might go the way of the dinosaurs. By the end of June, 80 applications for VHF television stations had been withdrawn from consideration by the FCC.[281]

Given this environment, Sarnoff once again needed an event to spur interest in commercial black-and-white television. He was waging a bitter fight with CBS on the issue of color television, but the industry needed something positive to get people excited about television. Back in 1939, he made a big splash at the World's Fair with his special radio and television building as well as daily television programming for the fairgoers to experience. In 1940, RCA slashed the prices of television sets, which caused demand to increase. But the FCC put a stop to that plan quickly since RCA was seen as attempting to set television standards when the government wanted more experimentation and improvement. This time, Sarnoff reached back into his vast broadcasting experience, and dusted off a stunt that had helped to create the Sarnoff myth back in the early days of radio.

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[281]"Television Dropouts Reach 80 During Week," *Broadcasting,* 1 July 1946, 81.

Dempsey and Radio Big Winners in the Ring

Back in 1921, David Sarnoff had just been named General Manger of RCA and he was trying to convince his bosses that people would soon want to buy "radio music boxes" to capture the songs, talks and other information that mostly amateur broadcasters were sending out over the airwaves. Sarnoff also knew RCA should be involved in not just the receiver end of radio, but also the broadcasting side. The National Broadcasting Company wouldn't be created for five more years. KDKA radio in Pittsburgh had started the widespread excitement of radio by reading election returns over the air in November 1920 when Warren Harding defeated James Cox. The following July, Sarnoff would turn to another event that would prove to be a staple of broadcasting for the rest of the century—boxing.

Sarnoff and his RCA crew were able to rig up a transmitting station outside the boxing ring in Jersey City for the heavyweight championship fight between champion Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier, a challenger from France. Dempsey knocked out Carpentier in the fourth round, just before the RCA equipment overheated and melted into a useless mess. The broadcast was a big success, with an estimated 300 thousand people listening on mostly homemade receivers. The success of the Dempsey broadcast cemented Sarnoff's status as a visionary for the potential of broadcasting.[282]

Louis Helps Television Deliver a Knockout

Twenty-five years later, almost to the day, Sarnoff needed the power of a heavyweight champion to lift the fortunes of a broadcasting industry once again. This time, the champion was Joe Louis and the industry in need of help was television. The fight had built-in drama which assured wide interest. Louis had been heavyweight

[282]Dempsey fight from Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel,* 68-81.

champion for nine years, but his four years in the Army had kept him out of the ring. Now he would face Billy Conn for the second time in five years. Conn had given Louis a pretty good fight the first time around, so fight fans wanted to see if Louis' Army time had made him more vulnerable. The fight generated enough fan interest that it was scheduled for Yankee Stadium with ringside seats going for $100.

Sarnoff wouldn't have to piece together equipment to broadcast this heavyweight championship. He had an experienced crew with the most advanced television technology available. Sarnoff and the others at NBC and RCA may have been immersed in television for several years at this point, but they knew that many of the people who would watch this fight would be seeing television for the first time. They were determined to show the power and potential of black-and-white television and remove the doubts that had been raised by CBS.

First, NBC bought the rights to telecast the Louis-Conn fight as well as most other important boxing matches in New York. Then, they convinced Gillette to sponsor the heavyweight championship. More than a month before the fight, John Royal, NBC's Vice President in charge of television promised the most comprehensive coverage of any sports event in television history. And Royal couldn't resist a jab at CBS: "And, I might add, this will be in black and white…and quite a few more will be in black and white too."

NBC also promised the fight would be covered by five different cameras, the most ever used for a single event. They promised that three of the five cameras would be the new image orthicon cameras which provide such crisp pictures outdoors. Never mind that only one such camera existed in early May, there would be two more by the night of the fight on June 19. The fight would also feature only the second use of a newly-designed turret-lens system on two of the cameras. In this era before the zoom lens, the

camera shot could only be changed by either physically changing the lens or moving the camera. The new system had separate lens positioned on a movable disc in front of the camera. To change the camera shot, the operator merely had to spin the turret to the appropriate lens. The producer of the broadcast, Burke Crotty, called the lens-turret assembly "the best damned television engineering job that's ever come out."

Crotty was definitely the right person to put in charge of the broadcast. He had directed NBC's first television boxing match back in 1939 and had been responsible for 220 more over the years. The NBC and RCA crew moved more than four tons of equipment into Yankee Stadium and 30 people were needed to pull off the broadcast on fight night.

NBC didn't only want to make sure the broadcast would be memorable, but also that the right people would see the effort. The Louis-Conn fight ran not only on WNBT in New York, but was also sent by coaxial cable to WPTZ in Philadelphia, WRGB in Schenectady, and Du Mont's experimental station in Washington, D.C., W3XWT.

The fight itself didn't live up to the advanced billing, but the broadcast was an unqualified success. Louis knocked out Conn in the eighth round after a fairly uneventful fight. But as Sarnoff had hoped, the next day people weren't talking about the fighters, but the telecast. NBC estimated that 100 thousand people watched the fight on television in the four different cities. With fewer than ten thousand sets in the whole country, this number included many television parties which packed in dozens of people in local bars, restaurants and hotels. Three hundred people jammed into one Greenwich Village tavern and the crowd got so excited that some were yelling at the set. Many people said the television coverage was better than paying for the $100 ringside seats.

The mood was a little more sedate in the air conditioned Statler Hotel in Washington, D.C. that night, but the impact of the broadcast in that room might have

helped determine the future of television. Sarnoff invited 800 key members of government and industry to watch the fight with him at the Statler. RCA installed 21 receivers around the room so everyone would get a good look at the program. The impressive guest list included four members of the FCC, including Chairman Charles Denny, and most agency department heads. The NBC television party also included a Supreme Court justice, three members of Truman's cabinet and 400 members of Congress. In case any of the influential people in the audience didn't know the real purpose of this television coming out party, Sarnoff mingled amongst the crowd asking: "Is this acceptable television?"

The answer was a resounding yes. A couple of comments overheard at another Washington television party that night: "What's all this fuss about waiting for color?" "How soon are these sets going to be available?" and "You say this is a prewar receiving set? How can you improve on this? This quality is every bit as good as 16 millimeter movies." Once again Sarnoff had relied on the stinging gloves of a heavyweight champion to promote his important medium of the moment.[283]

THE FCC DECIDES THE FATE OF CBS COLOR

The leadership at CBS and its television news crew had opposite goals concerning the existing television audience in 1946. The news people were experimenting and negotiating, struggling with visual ideas and methods to try to find the best way to present a television program that would engage and interest the rare television set owner

[283]Royal quote from "Louis-Conn Bout Video Rights Signed by Gillette for NBC," *Broadcasting,* 6 May 1946, 26; Sarnoff and viewer quotes from "Dignitaries Liked the Title Fight," *Broadcasting,* 24 June 1946, 16; Crotty quote and equipment information from "Telecast Culminated Four Days Labor," *Broadcasting,* 24 June 1946, 17; other fight details from Robert Richards, "Doubters Kayoed By Fight Telecast," *Broadcasting,* 24 June 1946, 15; "Press Comment on Television," *Broadcasting,* 24 June 1946, 15; Von Schilling, 72-73.

in New York City. At the same time, the concerted effort of the top management of CBS was to demonstrate to the FCC and the public that black-and-white television would never be acceptable. CBS could only succeed in slowing down RCA and NBC if it could demonstrate that black-and-white television would be a failure, and the only hope at a profitable industry was with color television in the UHF band.

Plus, CBS had to pressure the FCC into a decision on color television quickly. The network knew if RCA and other manufacturers were able to flood the market with black-and-white sets, the government would be less inclined to approve a system that could render all existing sets either useless or at least in need of an adaptor At this point, the network didn't expect the FCC to shut down the VHF channels altogether. CBS wanted the FCC to approve commercial standards for UHF color television. Then Columbia felt it could prove the superiority of color and force all stations to move up to UHF.

Peter Goldmark thought the network had a good chance of winning government approval. The CBS inventor felt that FCC Chairman Charles Denny had been especially impressed with the color system during a demonstration. Goldmark had given hundreds of color demonstrations since the end of the war, trying to drum up support for the system.

Sarnoff Fights for Black-and-White Future

But CBS wasn't the only broadcaster putting on demonstrations and lobbying for the future of television. Sarnoff and RCA matched CBS in publicity and intensity. Sarnoff never changed his basic message: CBS's color system was a throw-back to the old mechanical television systems of the 1920s. Goldmark relied on three spinning color discs in both the camera and the television set to recreate the colors. Sarnoff was merciless in his ridicule of the Goldmark color wheels. In November 1946, RCA

presented a color demonstration of its own. The system didn't work very well, but it had one advantage over the CBS version: no moving parts. RCA engineers had spent most of their time perfecting black-and-white television but had also begun work on a future color signal. Sarnoff invited the press to the demonstration to prove two main points; that electronic color was possible but that it was years away from being ready for the public. Even though the RCA color picture at that time couldn't match Goldmark's color wheels, Sarnoff scoffed at the difference. "Comparing electronic color with mechanical color," said Sarnoff, "is like comparing a Stratoliner with a horse and buggy."

Over at CBS, Frank Stanton heard from an FCC commissioner about concern that the network was sending mixed signals on the future of television. While CBS pushed the color system on the UHF band, the company still had applications pending for VHF stations. Stanton was told the CBS plan might have a better chance with the FCC if the network abandoned its efforts to land VHF television properties. So CBS took the bold step of walking away from potentially important television licenses and kept only its operation in New York City.

At the same time, NBC was pushing its radio affiliates to get into television as quickly as possible. By October 1946, NBC not only had its station in New York, WNBT, but also held construction permits for stations in Washington, Chicago and Cleveland. NBC radio affiliates had secured television licenses in Boston, Baltimore, Detroit, St. Paul., St. Louis, Albuquerque, Buffalo, Portland, OR, Johnstown, Providence, Fort Worth, Salt Lake City, and Richmond. ABC held construction permits for Detroit and Chicago while Du Mont already had WABD in New York and an experimental station in Washington. Meanwhile, CBS had WCBW. Only two CBS radio affiliates, in

Dallas and Louisville, had authorization to start television stations. Given this scenario, the FCC decision would determine if CBS would lead or be left behind in television.[284]

FCC Once Again Drains the Color from CBS Television Plans

In March 1947, the FCC voted once again against CBS color and paved the way for RCA/NBC dominance in postwar television. The FCC found two main problems with the CBS color plan: first, Columbia hadn't done enough field testing with its color equipment to be sure it would work in the home; and secondly, the commission felt a better color system might emerge after more years of experimentation. CBS had already invested more than $2 million dollars in color but the FCC urged the company to continue the experiments: "all persons with a true interest in the future of color television will continue their experimentation in this field in the hope that a satisfactory system can be developed and demonstrated at the earliest possible date."

The color war between CBS and NBC wasn't over. The battles would continue well into the 1950s. But this setback hit CBS hard. Not only did the network lose out on potentially leading the industry into color television, Columbia was left with only one television station while NBC had the properties in place to launch a true network as soon as technology would allow. Paley blamed both Kesten and Stanton for their "blind devotion" to Goldmark's color system. "The fault lay in our poor judgment in not having a fall-back position in the event our color system failed and in not having applied for license to acquire four more CBS-owned television stations back in 1946 or 1947. Those stations would have been ours for the asking at the time." CBS spent the next several years scrambling for television stations and paying millions more than would have been necessary in the mid-1940s.

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[284]Sarnoff quote and RCA demonstration from Bruce Robertson, "RCA Shows Electronic Color Television," *Broadcasting,* 4 November 1946, 18; Stanton and applications from Smith, 277-280; TV permits from "NBC Leads in Television Network Plans," *Broadcasting,* 7 October 1946, 42.

Years later, Goldmark viewed the FCC decision in 1947 as a major setback not only for CBS but for the public as well. Goldmark felt the UHF band not only offered color television but the opportunity for many more channels than were available on VHF. For Goldmark, opening up both VHF and UHF in the 1940s could have launched television in a different direction: "…the greater number of channels that would have been available nationally with UHF would have provided an opportunity to spread more views and approaches to the public, in the tradition of magazines and newspapers. This would have made television more responsible to the infinite variety of the American public interest."

CBS color supporters could only shake their heads six months after the decision when FCC Chairman Charles Denny resigned from government to become a vice president and general counsel for the National Broadcasting Company.[285]

CBS Slowing Down Television?

One popular take on the color war is that it had nothing to do with making television better, but instead was designed to delay the development of the medium, in order to keep radio on top as long as possible. Under this scenario, Columbia used Goldmark's invention to keep RCA and NBC from dominating television. By offering up the potential of color television at time when RCA was pushing black-and-white, CBS could cause enough uncertainty to keep the FCC from siding with RCA on standards and therefore keep the public from buying sets. This version of the color fight became popular since RCA had such a strong advantage in equipment and patents at a time when CBS concentrated mostly on radio. Even Stanton admitted that Paley mostly ignored

[285]Denny NBC job from Sol Taishoff, "Denny Leaves FCC to Join NBC Nov. 15," *Broadcasting,* 13 October 1947, 13; FCC "all persons" quote from "CBS Petition for Color TV Denied," *Broadcasting,* 24 March 1947, 14; Paley quote from Paley, *As It Happened,* 236-237; Goldmark quote from Goldmark, *Maverick Inventor* 95.

television in those early years, saying it "wasn't on Bill's plate." A common complaint at the time of the color fight was that CBS color would delay television several more years as the systems were tested and perfected.

One person who believed CBS was trying to slow down RCA was Worthington Miner. As the manager of the television department, Miner worked directly with Paul Kesten, who ran CBS while Paley was away during the war. Kesten asked Miner to periodically represent CBS at hearings concerning television standards. Miner said he soon tired of being the spoiler, the only person at the hearings arguing against the current system. Miner said he once innocently made a suggestion at a hearing that would have allowed both CBS color and black-and-white television to co-exist. Miner remembered that Kesten never spoke to him again: "Television was taken out of my hands by noon the following day. A short time later I was moved from my courtly offices at 15 Vanderbilt to a dust-closet on the top floor of a building opposite CBS…" While Kesten never told him about any devious plan, Miner came to believe that color television was just a tactic. "It took a long time for me to learn, even longer for me to accept, that it had become Kesten's covert policy to cripple television in order to enhance CBS's primacy in radio."[286]

TELEVISION COMES AROUND THE CORNER

The FCC decision against CBS color helped to finally push television around that elusive corner that had been supposedly just ahead for more than a quarter-century. At the time of the FCC ruling, J.R. Poppele, President of the Television Broadcasters

[286]Stanton quote from Smith, 277; Miner's quotes from Miner, *Miner,* 183, 179; additional background on FCC decision and CBS color system from "Decision Booms Interest in Television," *Broadcasting,* 13 March 1947, 13; Ritchie, 173-174; Von Schilling, 82-84; Smith, 274-279; Paley, *As It Happened,* 235-238; Kisseloff, 74-75.

Association, predicted the decision would have "far-reaching consequences in speeding up the expansion of a television service to the public." While this type of optimism had been declared many times in the past, this time television was ready and so was the public.[287]

Mob Scenes at Appliance Stores

The FCC commissioners might have been influenced by the reaction of Americans when new television sets finally went on sale in the fall of 1946, several months before the color decision. Some stores had to call the police to control the crowds after RCA started running ads for new sets in November. At Macy's in New York, special guardrails were constructed around each of the display models and a store policeman had to keep order as people stood 12 deep just to look at the new appliances. In Flushing, employees at Bright radio shop had to call the police because they were worried the crowds jammed in front of their store were going to shatter their display window just in front of the new sets. The RCA distributor in New York said in the first weekend alone, he had orders for between three and four thousand television receivers, at $350 each, not including the $50 installation charge. The same excitement over television played out that weekend in Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, and Albany; the cities in which RCA planned to sell its first batch of postwar sets.[288]

Manufacturers couldn't keep up with demand and had only turned out about 8 to 10 thousand new television sets by the end of 1946. But with expanded production and the confidence of a black-and-white television future after the FCC ruling in March, more than 200 thousand sets filled the living rooms and bars in cities with television stations in 1947. Television sets ranged in cost from $250 for small table models all the way up to

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[287]Poppele's quote from "Decision Booms Interest in Television."

[288]"Mobs Jam Stores Showing TV Sets," *Broadcasting,* 11 November 1946, 73.

$25 hundred for console models that also included radio. Those sets translated into an audience of 1.5 million people now watching television. New York City had the most stations and the most people, so that area sold the most sets. By the end of 1947, anywhere from 50 to 75 thousand sets had been installed in and around New York City.[289]

More Stations Bring Television to Wider Audience

At the end of 1946, still only New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, and Schenectady had stations on the air presenting programming. In addition to the nine stations in those cities, the FCC had approved 46 other licenses in cities across the country. All of those stations were either under construction, scheduled for construction, or waiting for back-ordered transmitting equipment. At the same time, AT&T was working on a nationwide coaxial cable network, primarily for telephone service, but that could also be used for video. The ambitious project was mostly on the drawing board, but crews had begun to lay the wires between Indianapolis and Terre Haute, Indiana, between Jacksonville, Florida and El Paso, Texas, between Minneapolis and Stevens Point, Wisconsin, from Albany to Cleveland, and from New York to Charlotte.

In 1947, ten more stations hit the air, bringing television to Baltimore, Washington D.C., Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee and St. Louis. Thirty more companies had FCC authorization to start service in 1948. The FCC had handed out all seven licenses for stations in New York, the most of any city in the country. A coaxial cable line now linked New York with Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington, D.C. WBKB in Chicago set up a unique radio relay system with South Bend, Indiana, creating the first Midwest "network." Two stumbling blocks had also been removed from the

[289]Television set numbers from "Television Today-Facts and Figures," *The 1948 Radio Annual,* 1047; Jim Owens, "The Tele Receiver Market," *The 1948 Radio Annual,* 41; Jim Owens, "The Tele Receiver Market," *The 1947 Radio Annual,* 1003.

advancement of television. Industry leaders had been able to beat back an idea to slap an amusement tax on all televisions in public places and New York City landlords were convinced to scrap a movement to ban rooftop television antennas.[290]

With the proliferation of new technology and the building excitement of video, several television "firsts' were recorded during this time. All three New York stations worked together on the first live telecast from Washington, DC in February 1946. That Washington connection made possible live coverage from Congress, including a speech by President Truman to a joint session of the House and Senate. Truman also appeared live on television for the opening of a United Nations Security Council meeting.[291]

In 1947, the biggest television event since the Louis-Conn fight also came from the sports world. In a match-up made for New York television, the Brooklyn Dodgers faced the New York Yankees in the World Series. The first televised World Series was shared by all three New York stations and was sent live to Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Schenectady. The Series proved to be a fall classic. The Yankees won the first two games, but the Dodgers grabbed the third game. Bars with TV sets were mobbed with customers during the games. Taverns from New York to Washington reported business increases as high as 500 percent while the Yankees and Dodgers battled through a full seven game series. The Yankees pulled out the series, but television once again got much of the attention because of its coverage of a sporting event. More than half a million people watched all or part of the series on television. Worthington Miner said

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[290]1946 station numbers from *The 1947 Radio Annual,* 1001, 1008-1009, 1035-1037; 1947 information from *The 1948 Radio Annual,* 43, 1047.

[291]television firsts from "The Outstanding Television Events of 1946," and "Tele Tempo Today-Facts and Figures," *The 1947 Radio Annual,* 43, 991

when Paley saw the success of the World Series, he pulled Miner out of exile and told him to start working on new entertainment programs for the station.[292]

CBS TELEVISION RISES WITH TELEVISION'S TIDE

While the broadcasting industry may have been focusing on CBS's color defeat, the crew at CBS-TV in New York kept working as if the company was leading the way in television. Even some 60 years later, many members of this group won't buy the idea that CBS was trying to slow down the industry, or even that their company wasn't leading the way in television. In their world, the signal had always been black-and-white and the audience had never stretched beyond New York City. For the crew at CBS-TV in New York, they were part of something that was going to get much bigger and they kept working on ways to improve the product.

One noticeable change happened in November 1946 when WCBW became WCBS-TV. The CBS radio station in New York had always been WABC, but when NBC Blue became the ABC network, the identity became a bit confusing. So the network was able to get the WCBS call letters from a station in Springfield, Illinois and switched its AM and TV stations to the new group of letters. When CBS was finally able to get a couple of image orthicon cameras from RCA for its mobile unit, WCBS started to rely heavily on remote broadcasts. The station was showing Columbia University football games, Brooklyn Dodgers baseball games, college basketball and hockey from Madison Square Garden, horse shows, and many other sports events.

In 1947, the station began to use its live capabilities for other programming as well. WCBS presented a pilot training class live from an airport, a cooking program at a

[292]World series information from "Radio-TV Draw Huge Series Audience," *Broadcasting,* 6 October 1947, 83, Von Schilling, 93-95.

New York restaurant, and a teenage fashion show live from Washington Irving High School. CBS also started to work on a future television network by sharing programs with both WMAR in Baltimore and WMAL in Washington, D.C. By December 1947, the New York station was offering 20 hours of programming a week.

WCBS-TV News

The efforts of the news department at CBS-TV started to gain wider attention, especially as more people were able to watch television when the new sets hit the market. The newscast got a major boost in June 1946 when Gulf Oil Company signed a one-year contract to sponsor the Thursday night newscast. The Gulf deal signaled the first sponsorship ever signed at CBS-TV. Instead of lamenting the commercial time that now had to be fit into the program, the crew said the Gulf announcement proved the newscast was gaining an audience. Now, instead of just being a drain on the CBS budget, the news department was now giving something back. The next month, the station took part in historic coverage of atomic bomb tests in the Bikini atoll. While all the local stations, radio and television, covered the events, the CBS-TV crew turned the event into a nine-part series on the implications of atomic weapons for world order.

In November 1946, WCBS-TV put its entire staff to work to cover election night returns. Once again, the news crew turned to simple maps to visually bring the election picture to the audience. They developed a national map in which the individual states could be identified by an "R" or "D" depending on the vote. The election set also provided for a quick view of the returns in the New York City area. Critics said the emphasis on visuals "gave the home audience an easily grasped view of the national status at any time." Commentators Tom O'Connor and Jim McMullin handled the returns while Gil Fates presented the overall picture. The coverage was deemed "a clear and effective picture of the progress" of election night. To make the broadcast more

complicated, CBS had already contracted to run the National Horse Show. So the station presented live coverage of the horses at Madison Square Garden and the news crew would cut in with election news at various times during the evening. At the end of the year, WCBS-TV news was once again honored by the American Television Society for providing "the year's outstanding news programs." [293]

In early 1947, CBS-TV news settled into a routine of offering two 15-minute newscasts a week in addition to a weekly news review program on Sunday nights. Fred Rickey had emerged as the best director for the fast-paced newscasts and became heavily involved in the production of the newscasts. Rickey went beyond the usual duties of a television director and became an important person for helping shape the newscast and work on the presentation. Rickey's ability to work not only on the technical side of the broadcast, but also on the editorial side of helping to choose stories and visualization possibilities brought about an expanded role for a television director. The next year, Rickey would be joined by a new associate director, Don Hewitt, who would push the boundaries even further. Henry Cassirer tried to sit in the chair and direct a few newscasts himself, but found he couldn't keep up with the constantly changing visual sources used during the newscast. "I was never able to direct," Cassirer remembers. "I didn't have the talent of rapidly seeing what needed to be done."

The face of CBS-TV news continued to change during this period. The radio announcers of the early years, Holles, Calmer, and Jackson, had given way to people like Tom O'Connor, Bob McKee, and Jim McMullin. In April 1947, a CBS radio

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[293]CBS programming changes from "On Location Technique Applied by CBS to Wide Variety of Television Programs," CBS Press Release, 3 September 1947; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL); WCBS-TV FCC License Renewal Application, 1 December 1947 and WCBS-TV FCC License Renewal Application, 27 January 1949, Exhibit 2; WCBS 12/14/46-7/1/51; (FCC-DB); election night coverage from "Election Balloting Given by Television," *Broadcasting,* 11 November 1946, 14; news award from "Television Awards for 1946," *1947 Radio Annual,* 998.

correspondent made his first appearance as commentator on the television newscast. Douglas Edwards went over well with the crew the previous year when he appeared as a guest on the station to talk about his foreign reporting experiences. Now, he was being asked to come back to work as the commentator on the television newscast on a more regular basis.

The television news people also had to muster all the visualization skills at their disposal for several months in 1947. After CBS lost the color fight to RCA, the network temporarily shut down its Grand Central Terminal studios in May. The studio staff was either let go or moved over to work on a second mobile unit the network had purchased. CBS didn't cut down the number of hours on the air, but now most of the programs would be live broadcasts from other locations, such as Madison Square Garden, Forest Hills tennis stadium, or Ebbets Field. Without a studio, *CBS Television News* had to present all of its news via film, photographs, animations or other graphics, without showing the commentator live on camera.[294]

The change in format caused the news people to try even more experiments in what might work on a television newscast. In June 1947, the top political story was the Taft-Hartley labor bill which was causing a lot of debate in Washington. The bill would sharply curtail the power of labor unions in this country which brought out strong emotions on both sides of the issue.[295] Even though CBS didn't yet have a television affiliate in Washington, the news crew wanted to provide more information on the issue. So CBS contracted with the ABC affiliate in Washington, WMAL-TV, to shoot an interview with U.S. Rep. Fred Hartley during the Thursday newscast. CBS Washington radio correspondent Bill Shadel interviewed Hartley at the WMAL-TV studios and the

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[294] Cassirer and Bendick quotes from interviews, (HC-OH), (RB-OH1/2); CBS shuts down studio from "CBS Not to Abandon Video Activities," *Broadcasting,* 12 May 1947, 17.

[295]Congress passed the Taft-Hartley bill, even after a veto by President Truman.

exchange was sent by coaxial cable to New York to run live as part of the newscast. Presenting live programming from Washington was nothing new. Stations had been using the coaxial cable between the cities for more than a year. But the Hartley interview was the first time a live interview from Washington had been scheduled as part of a regularly-scheduled television newscast.

With each bit of success, with each signal that television was growing in significance, especially with the addition of more sponsored programming, the people at WCBS-TV noticed that the work climate was changing. They heard more comments from management, occasional mentions from people on the street, and increased scrutiny of their efforts. Bendick said he could watch the programs "tightening, becoming more professional, as the interest in it rose, so did the way we did things, because you had to be more professional and the stakes were getting higher."

The crew at WCBS-TV news needed to be ready. If they thought the industry had taken some big steps before, little could prepare them for the explosion of television in 1948. Dozens of new stations were getting ready to bring television to many more cities. 100 thousand sets would be rolling off the assembly lines each month. Several cities on the east coast would all be linked together in a network. Three out of the four political parties fighting for the Presidency would pick a convention site mainly because of the power of the visual medium. According to Jack Alicoate, the editor of *The 1948 Radio Annual*, television "is moving forward with the grace of a rocket and the force of an atom bomb."[296]

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[296] Hartley interview from "Program for WCBS-TV Handled by WMAL-TV," *Broadcasting,* 9 June 1947, 75, and photo with caption, *Broadcasting,* 16 June 1947, 96; Alicoate quote from Jack Alicoate, "Television," *The 1948 Radio Annual,* 1043.

Chapter 6

CBS-TV News: 1948

The Emerald City

In 1948, the television faithful could finally stop pushing the medium with vague future predictions of grandeur. Instead, the actual progress provided ample proof television had become a force in the post-war economy. The 17 stations on the air at the start of the year would swell to 49. A commercial coaxial cable would finally allow for network television, at least for part of the east coast. Close to a million television sets would be built and sold during the year. Three out of four political parties would choose their convention site based on the new medium.

CBS video pioneer Gilbert Seldes, once again writing for *The Atlantic Monthly,* worried the velocity of the growth would hurt the quality of the programming: "instead of being developed, it was being inflated." Seldes, who had argued for a patient, reasoned approach to perfecting television programming more than a decade earlier, now worried the young industry had been overtaken by the technology and its leaders had abdicated their role in creating entertainment programming, "and were waiting for someone else to pump a blood stream through its arteries." Seldes pointed most of his criticism at the entertainment programming, but television news would also be infused with fresh blood during the year. The news departments needed more personnel because

of an increasing number of newscasts, and these opportunities sparked an interest in people who started to see the unique challenge of visualizing the news.[297]

A MIXTURE OF *42ND STREET* AND *THE FRONT PAGE*

Don Hewitt was restless. He still hadn't found that perfect news job he had been seeking since World War II. Hewitt spent part of the war as a correspondent for the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper and knew he was destined to be a foreign correspondent. But after the war, his old newspaper, the *New York Herald-Tribune* didn't share his career vision. Instead, Hewitt turned down the paper's offer of coming back as head copy boy. Instead, he moved out to Memphis, Tennessee, as a night editor for the Associated Press. But if he couldn't be a foreign correspondent, Hewitt certainly wanted to be in or near New York City, so after only six months in Tennessee, he came back to New York to edit the *Pelham Sun* newspaper.

Hewitt's next move signaled his transition from straight print news. He left the Pelham paper and moved back to New York City as the night telephoto editor for *Acme Newspictures*, the photography arm of the United Press. Hewitt would select the best pictures from the *Acme* photographers, write captions for the photos, and then transmit the images across the wire to newspapers around the country. "Sounds like the big time, but it didn't look like it. The place was musty, and so was the job, and if this was journalism, I thought, maybe I'd better start looking for something more exciting."

That something turned out to be television news. In 1948, a friend told Hewitt about an opening at CBS. Hewitt went over to the Grand Central Terminal studio for the interview. Before meeting with Bob Bendick about the job, Hewitt wandered around the television studio. "(I) felt like Dorothy in the Emerald City. There were cameras and

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[297]Seldes quotes from Gilbert Seldes, "Television: The Golden Hope," *Atlantic Monthly,* March 1949, 34-37.

mikes and booms and make-up people and extras and I said, 'My God, it's like a Hollywood set,' and I got hired." Even with a wife, a child and another baby on the way, Hewitt took a 20 percent pay cut from his job at *Acme Newspictures* so he could start as associate director for CBS at $80 a week.

Hewitt invokes the "show biz" phrase when describing television, but he uses the term to describe what attracted him to the lower-paying television job in the first place. Two of his role models had been fictional characters: Broadway producer Julian Marsh in *42nd Street* and Hildy Johnson, the reporter in *The Front Page*. "So I came into this television studio and said, 'Oh my God, in television I can be both!' I can be a show biz producer and a reporter. It was a dream come true, that's what excited me. I could do the two things I wanted to do more than anything in the world."

Hewitt might have questioned his decision after working alongside Director Fred Rickey on the first day. Hewitt said Rickey smoked constantly and accidentally dropped a lit cigarette in Hewitt's pocket. "I'm trying to follow the script and I'm pounding my coat, trying to put out the fire in my suit, while he's yelling, 'Follow the script.' (But) my suit's on fire!" Hewitt said Rickey yelled back at him, "The hell with your suit. Follow the script!" Hewitt first thought the CBS people were too crazy for him, but said later he realized he was the craziest of the group.

As Director of News and Special Events, Bob Bendick felt Hewitt brought a necessary spark to the news effort just as CBS-TV news got ready to expand. "He was a great guy to have in a new institution because he was full of energy and ideas. And I guess I was impressed by—it's an expression I don't like using—he thought outside the box a lot, came up with good ideas, and was a terrific worker." [298]

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[298]Hewitt "big time" quote from Hewitt, *Tell Me A Story,* 41-42; "emerald city" and "I can be both" quotes from interview, (DH-OH2); cigarette in pocket quote from Kisseloff, 363; Bendick quote

What a Way to Live

Another person who would survive and succeed in network news for decades also came into television because of an innate interest in the merging of news and pictures. Reuven Frank didn't have any broadcasting experience in 1950 when a friend talked him into going over to NBC for a job interview. Frank received his degree from the famed journalism school at Columbia University. After graduating from Columbia, Frank spent three years at the *Newark News,* working his way up from reporter to night city editor. Frank found he enjoyed picture editing. "I wasn't very good at it," said Frank, "but when I was night city editor I really loved cropping pictures and going up to the art department."

Television news hooked Frank from the moment he stepped into NBC's film screening room. He watched while the film editor and writer reviewed a film negative of an international story: "And it was some news event in Berlin, guys marching up and down, a street car, people going, and you had to get used to seeing these pictures in negative. And when it ran out, this guy said 'That's not worth more than 40 seconds. Why don't you start with this and then that...' And I said 'what a way to live.'"

Frank, like Hewitt, had a wife and a young child at home; but he decided to take the chance on television. For two weeks, he worked both at NBC and the *Newark News* before finally putting his print career behind him for good.

Both Hewitt and Frank found inspiration in a format for news that so many other reporters had shunned. For these two men, the addition of sight and sound to the printed word predicted an interesting new world of reporting and writing. Not many people

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from interview, (RB-OH2); other Hewitt information from Don Hewitt, *Minute By Minute…* (New York: Random House, 1985), 15-18.

would become so excited by a television studio, in Hewitt's case, or a film screening room, where Frank decided to change his career. Frank tried to put into words the importance of his first taste of television film editing: "First, the manipulation of pictures—a writing process without words. The arrangement of ideas. And you know, good pictures are matchless. The 'doing things' that got to me. You start with raw material and you make something of it."

Hewitt and Frank shared another sentiment about television. They both saw little of interest on the video screen in the late 1940s. Hewitt is fond of saying the only two things worth watching on television in 1948 were Milton Berle and the occasional Joe Louis championship fight. He did not include CBS television news.

Frank first watched television during his lunch breaks at the *Newark News*. He said he would visit a local bar and watch a baseball game on television while eating a sandwich. He said the games were difficult to watch on TV. "And then I'd see it at somebody's house and I'd have them put on a news program, just so I could see a news program and I thought they were just awful, somebody talking and still pictures being manipulated…stuff like that." After getting into television, he realized he must have been watching the 11:00 P.M. newscasts, which had few resources in the early years. Even with their low opinion of the early years of the video format, both men turned away from secure news jobs to cast their lot with television.[299]

Hollywood Training Ground

Television didn't just attract former print journalists during this era. On the entertainment side, people who were looking to break into movies or Broadway migrated to the low-paying opportunities in early television. But since the television operations

[299]Frank "wasn't very good," "some news event," "manipulation," and watching early TV quotes from interview, (RF-OH2).

hadn't become so large and segmented yet, many of these people also had at least some involvement in the newscasts.

Hewitt claims he was able to rise so quickly in television because all of his competition quickly moved to Hollywood. When he was first promoted to director of the newscasts, he worked alongside Franklin Schaffner. But Schaffner soon left CBS for a successful career in motion pictures, directing such films as *Papillon* and *Patton*. Other men involved on the production side at CBS during that time included actor Yul Brynner, and future Hollywood directors Sidney Lumet and John Frankenheimer. "They left me there and it was easy," said Hewitt. "And I've always figured that I got where I got because they all left." [300]

STRUGGLING WITH THE ROLE OF THE COMMENTATOR

One of the most common, constantly-reinforced, misconceptions about the development of television news in this country involves the role of the person reading the news on camera. Since the anchor of the evening news developed into a star position, the highest-paid, and most visible person in the news division, the convenient explanation is that TV news began that way. In this scenario, the birth of television news is pushed forward to, at the earliest 1948 or 1949, when Douglas Edwards took over permanently on CBS-TV News and John Cameron Swayze became the face of NBC's *Camel News Caravan*.[301]

In her book on the network news anchor, *The Evening Stars,* Barbara Matusow continued the common theme: "From the start, the CBS-TV News, as it was first called,

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[300]Hewitt quote from interview, (DH-OH2).

[301]Barnouw, *The Image Empire,* 41; Frank, *Out of Thin Air,* 7; Christopher H. Sterling and John M. Kittross, *Stay Tuned: A Concise History of American Broadcasting* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1978), 287.

was built around Douglas Edwards to an extraordinary degree…" Even the man who signed the checks was apparently oblivious to years of newscasts on his own network: In his memoirs, William S. Paley showed his disinterest or ignorance in the early years of CBS-TV news: "Television news began on CBS in 1946 with one regular weekly Saturday night broadcast with Douglas Edwards as our first TV newscaster. Edwards got the job because he was the only experienced newsman on staff willing to make the transition from radio to television."[302]

Douglas Edwards certainly became the face of CBS-TV news. He sat behind the desk on the CBS network newscast for 14 years before being ousted in favor of Walter Cronkite in 1962. But as late as the spring of 1948, Edwards was just one of a group of announcers who moved in and out of the television newscasts. CBS-TV news was not "built around" Edwards, or any other person for that matter in the early years. Quite the opposite occurred.

Throughout the mid-1940s, the CBS-TV news crew struggled and argued over the role of the commentator on television: Should he be a newsman or a polished announcer? Should he appear learned or like a neighbor next door? Or should the viewer even see him at all during the newscast? Since these news people were working in an unknown medium with few viewers and little direction, finding the proper person and role for the commentator[303] became one of the top concerns of the staff at CBS-TV news.

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[302]Matusow, 51; Paley, *As It Happened,* 296.

[303]The term anchor doesn't appear in this section because it wouldn't be used in broadcasting until the early 1950s. Buried on the third page of a CBS press release in June 1952 is an unexplained description of what Walter Cronkite would be doing during the upcoming presidential convention coverage. At the end of a paragraph is this cryptic sentence: "Cronkite, chief CBS-TV Washington correspondent, will serve as 'anchor man' of the convention's coverage." The term would eventually become the most common way to identify the person on camera reading the news on television. The news origin of the word is caught in the mists and conflicting memories of time. Most agree anchor was first used to explain Cronkite's role at the convention as the commentator who would tie together the coverage. Hewitt said he came up with it to explain how Cronkite would act as the final, "anchor" leg of a relay race. CBS President Sig Mickelson also claimed authorship and the meaning could have nautical origins with Cronkite keeping the coverage centered like a boat anchor. Cronkite believes the first person to refer to a news commentator as an anchor

Photogenic Person or Sourceless Voice?

For decades, as television started and stopped, experimented and shut down, writers speculated on what form the medium would eventually take. One of the most important issues involved what type of person would succeed on television. In the early 1930s, when CBS was still broadcasting an experimental signal with its old mechanical television system, broadcast enthusiast and writer Orrin Dunlap contemplated the winners and losers in the new medium. At the time of his writing, the talkies were killing off the careers of silent film stars in Hollywood, so Dunlap envisioned a similar weeding out process in television, with the senses reversed:

> All broadcast stars should not expect to win new triumphs when radio is given eyes that enable the audience to see. They may be delightful and serene on the wings of sound alone but that does not mean that the eye will be pleased with them too. Some will captivate both eye and ear. They will be the stars of television. The entertainer who can please the eye need not worry so much about the ear. But the one who can please the ear and not the eye had better watch out.[304]

Dunlap didn't focus on news broadcasters since news hadn't really found its niche on radio at that time. The common concern centered on how the person would be judged by looks on television, much as the silent movie actors were critiqued by their voices in the sound films. Early television pioneer Thomas Hutchinson wrote in the 1940s that the person would have to be "photogenic" to succeed on television. "Their physical appearance must be such that the majority of viewers will want to look at them.

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was either Mickelson or manager Paul Levitan. No matter the origin, the term wasn't used in the 1940s. Instead, during that era, the person reading the news on television was referred to as the newscaster, commentator or announcer of the newscast. "CBS Television Will Bring Most Exciting Presidential Conventions…," CBS Press Release, June 1952; Box 3E22, 1951-1954; (CB-CAH); Hewitt, *Tell Me a Story,* 51; Sig Mickelson, *CBS in the 1950s,* 81; Mickelson interview, (SM-OH); Walter Cronkite, *A Reporter's Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 176.

[304]Dunlap, *Outlook for Television,* 238.

There is no implied suggestion that all television announcers must be prize winning beauties but they must be 'good to look at.'"

Everyone who appeared on the small screen was put through the television acceptability filter. At the opening of the New York World's Fair in 1939, numerous politicians and other civic leaders paraded in front of the television cameras. Afterwards, the RCA engineering crew working on the mobile truck voted New York Mayor Fiorello La Guardia as "the most telegenic man in New York. [305]

Exposing the Man Behind the Curtain

But as popular radio announcers and commentators started to dabble in television in the 1930s, a different reaction arose. The concern shifted from what the person could bring to television to what the viewers lost in the translation, which was mainly imagination. Gilbert Seldes noticed this difference when he was sampling experimental television in the 1930s before joining CBS: "Handsome as I am sure all news commentators are, the sight of them reading their comments, which audiences generally imagine are impromptu, would not be a particular gain." Television broke the illusion of the radio commentator as an extemporaneous speaker. Plus, the aural medium had allowed the listeners to create their own image of how the faceless voice should look and act. "There has been an advantage in the sourceless voice," wrote Seldes. "It has been not-human, even superhuman. In the newsreels, Father Coughlin[306], for instance, lost much of the authority he exerted over the air, Huey Long, on the whole, gained; Mr. Roosevelt, in my opinion, loses a little, but I do not believe that this is a universal judgment."[307]

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[305]Hutchinson, *Here is Television,* 122; La Guardia from Orrin Dunlap, "Ceremony is Carried by Television as Industry Makes Its Formal Bow," *New York Times,* 1 May 1939, 8.

[306]Father Coughlin of Royal Oak, Michigan had a popular nationwide radio program in the 1930s, Barnouw, *The Golden Web,* 44-51.

[307]Seldes, "Errors of Television," 537.

When critics and other viewers started to get a regular look at television newscasts, both before Pearl Harbor and later as the war started to wind down, the idea of the commentator as the reason to watch a broadcast couldn't have been further from the common reaction. In 1941, *Variety* remarked there is "nothing very glamorous" about watching a commentator reading a news script on camera, even when that commentator was Lowell Thomas, one of the most famous radio news announcers in the country. Three years later, Thomas is once again singled out for using prepared scripts on an interview program. In a critical look at post-war television, *The Saturday Evening Post* ran a picture of a CBS news commentator and warned "News broadcasters of the future may have to grow beards or learn to juggle. Fans who don't tire of an announcer's voice say that looking at the human face soon becomes unbearably boring."

Even CBS's study of non-television viewers in 1944 and 1945 warned of the problem of relying on a popular radio reporter or analyst on television: "An initial glance satisfies most viewers' curiosity about the reporter. To hold viewer interest, television's newscasters have to offer more than their counterparts in radio. Reading from a script is too static." [308]

Newscaster as Just Another Element in Newscast

Given the reaction of the critics, viewers, as well as their own observations, the CBS-TV news people did not look to a well-known radio newsman to carry the broadcast. Since most of the CBS radio news people shunned television, it probably wasn't an option anyway. Instead, the crew concentrated on the part of the criticism within its grasp. The problem didn't necessarily seem to be with the commentator himself, but with the lack of other visual elements in the newscast. Therefore, the CBS-

[308]"nothing very glamorous" from "Lowell Thomas," *Variety,* 9 July 1941, 30; prepared scripts from "Lowell Thomas on NBC Video Show," *Variety,* 21 June 1944, 35; "grow beards" from Johnston, "Television: Boom or Bubble?, 11; "initial glance" from Katz and Dichter, 9.

TV news crew spent most of its time working on different ways to visualize the stories, both to make the content understandable to the viewer and also to keep the newscast moving and visually interesting. Within that framework, the news team still struggled with the role of the commentator.

Hiding the Commentator Behind the Pictures

Henry Cassirer said he first wanted to keep the announcer off camera as much as possible, much like a newsreel announcer. He thought the idea of putting a camera in a radio studio for a newscast was lazy and a waste of the visual medium. So, going in completely the other direction, the crew tried to visualize every story, using the newscaster as a faceless voice. "Our first mistake was to discard the commentator," remembered Cassirer, "because we didn't want to be radio on television. But it isn't radio." Plus, during those early years, the news team didn't have enough resources at its disposal to visualize all the stories. The news department continued to work on ways to visualize most of the stories, but featuring the commentator on camera, for at least part of the newscast, became the standard.

Cassirer's writings during this period evolve through distinct phases concerning the newscaster. Early articles focus on the novelty of seeing radio newscasters on television, followed by the concern of boring the viewers with too much face time, and finally an emphasis of the individual personality of the commentator.

When Cassirer started with CBS-TV news, the first three news announcers, Calmer, Holles and Jackson, were relatively well-known on CBS radio at the time. Therefore, Cassirer noticed the newscast put a face to a familiar voice: "the newscaster emerges from the cloak of invisibility and his three dimensional personality as it appears on the screen helps to impress the spoken word upon the listener." But his disdain for stations that merely put a radio newscaster on camera with few other visual elements is

obvious. In fact he refers to those programs as "news on television" since he believed they didn't deserve to be called television news: "You see the commentator reading his script, a stationary close-up of his head while he is trying to exercise every art of mimic to bring some life into his delivery."

Almost from the beginning Cassirer is cognizant of the viewer's apparent short attention span for watching an announcer on camera. In a letter to the Foreign Press Association outlining the strengths of television news, he leaves the role of the announcer to the end, almost as an afterthought. "Some news can always be given life by the commentator, though it is our experience that audience tires fairly quickly of looking at the familiar face of the newsman reading his copy." In another instance, Cassirer pushes the bored viewer theme even further: "Once the viewer has become familiar with the commentator's face, his eyes tends to wander and he follows the newscast only with his ears. That is to say, the visual appeal of Television ceases to be effective." [309]

During this period at CBS-TV news, the commentator is definitely not the star of the newscast nor the focal point of the production. Instead, the announcer loses his identity and becomes just one of many visualization possibilities that should be utilized in the newscast. The newscaster appears interchangeable in this era, a tool to be used, but not overused, during the newscast.

Sponsoring the News, Not the Commentator

Another misconception that feeds into the anchor as star idea is that advertisers didn't become interested until CBS picked Edwards to permanently read the news on television. Instead, Gulf Oil first sponsored the newscast in the summer of 1946, in the

[309]"newscaster emerges from Cassirer, "Telecasting the News," 13; "you see the commentator" and "once the viewer" from Cassirer, "Television News is Different;" "some news can" from Henry R. Cassirer, "Challenging Invitation," Letter to the Editor, The Foreign Press News, No. 11, February 1949; Until 1951: Misc. Notes and Speeches; (HC-CAH).

midst of some of the most frequent experimentation in announcers. In fact, the article celebrating this important moment for WCBW doesn't even mention a commentator by name. The strength and value of the program is seen, not as a reflection of who is reading the news, but how the newscast is produced: "It is planned to exploit television's potency as a visual medium by using special newsreel films, up to the minute news photo 'stills' and animated maps and charts. Running commentary will translate and interpret importance of the events viewed."[310] The anonymity of the commentator is understandable since CBS didn't settle on a permanent news anchor until half-way through 1948.

On one hand, the commentator was an element of the newscast. But since the news people worked with a variety of announcers and watched other newscasts on television, the discussions and debates invariably turned towards what type of person would work best in the visual newscast environment. At this point, the announcer became an individual, with strengths or weaknesses to bring to the newscast. Cassirer put himself in the shoes of the novice television commentator and reverted back to the Hollywood comparison:

> Will he be cast into oblivion like the actors of the silent movie? Where they weren't good at talking, he might not be good at acting. For, believe it or not, the newscaster has to act on Television. It is not false acting that is required, but his face, his smile and his eyes have to give expression to his report as convincingly as does his voice on the radio. The commentator faces an audience which scrutinizes every move of his face more closely than that of any public speaker. But don't be afraid, you don't have to stare at the commentator's face for long.[311]

Instead of building a newscast around a personality, the CBS-TV news people worked on a newscast format based on their perceptions and experience of what the visual medium should provide, while the commentators came and went. But with each

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[310]"Gulf on WCBW," *Broadcasting,* 17 June 1946, 80.

[311]Cassirer, "News on Television."

new announcer experience, the crew debated and contemplated what type of person would work best within the format they had created. For four years, the faces changed so quickly the news team had a wealth of experience from which to base its judgments.

COMMENTATORS' MUSICAL CHAIRS

Since August 1948, CBS-TV news has had only four main anchors: Douglas Edwards, Walter Cronkite, Dan Rather and Connie Chung. Besides the short-lived Rather-Chung co-anchor experiment in the mid-1990s, the three faces of CBS News have spent a lot of time in the main chair. Edwards lasted 14 years, Cronkite 19 years, and Rather, who is still in command of the main chair after 23 years. Three anchors in 56 years. From 1944 to 1948, CBS-TV news had at least eleven commentators: Ned Calmer, Everett Holles, Allan Jackson, Stan Smith, Milo Boulton, Tom O'Connor, Bob McKee, James C. McMullin, Dwight Cooke, Larry LeSueur, and Douglas Edwards. More than likely, even more people sat in that CBS-TV news chair once or twice during that period. A least eleven newscasters in four years broadcasting the news compared to four anchors in 56 years. The mid-1940s at CBS-TV news was definitely not the era of the personality-driven newscast.

Evaluating the Announcers

In many cases, it's unclear who decided to try certain people on the television newscast and why those people were chosen for a position that was later destined to be so critical to the fortunes of the news department. Going back to the 1941 newscasts, Richard Hubbell came out of the experimental television production group assembled by Gilbert Seldes. CBS News head Paul White only contributed junior writer Bob Skedgell to the newscast. Hubbell apparently didn't have any news background, but fit the

position because of his knowledge of early television. After the newscasts were cancelled, Hubbell parlayed his television experience into a couple of books and various jobs relating to his early video work. By the late 1940s, Hubbell had started a consulting firm to help companies launch television stations.

When WCBW-TV re-started live programming in 1944, CBS radio news had a more direct involvement. Since the newscasts were only once or twice a week, radio commentators handled the television newscasts in addition to their full time work over at CBS radio. Ned Calmer read the news for WCBW for the first month before Everett Holles took over those responsibilities.[312] Holles doubled as Paul White's right-hand man, as Assistant Director of News for CBS radio at the time. He stayed with WCBW until transferring to WBBM radio in Chicago in the spring of 1945. At that point, another CBS radio announcer, Allan Jackson, stepped into the television duties. From the spring of 1945 until Douglas Edwards settled into the chair permanently in 1948, the crew watched a parade of people, from a variety of backgrounds, try to master the visual medium.

While the announcers struggled with the new medium, the news crew went through its own discovery period. Bob Bendick said he had to think about such trivial matters as what the person should wear. "Did they wear ties, did they wear a coat, did they wear a striped shirt?" asked Bendick. "Did they wear a blue shirt, white shirt? And this went into much experimentation and in those days things were much more reserved and a tie and a coat were absolute." Chet Burger said the news department experimented

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[312]Calmer stayed with radio news after that first month with WCBW. But his impression of what the television news commentator became wasn't very favorable, considering a novel he later wrote called *Anchorman*. In the novel, the main anchor for a network newscast is chosen for his looks and ability to read on camera. The anchor only wins redemption by walking away from the money and fame to get back on the streets as a reporter, where he is immediately shot and killed. Ned Calmer, *The Anchorman* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1970).

with images as well. "We tried charming young people. We tried handsome people. We tried an old man with a beard for authority at a time when people didn't wear beards."

Henry Cassirer recalled this as a time when few people had television sets and CBS management left the news department alone; which provided a good opportunity to struggle with issues that were new to the visual medium. "We weren't sure at all. We tried out all kinds of people," said Cassirer. "We didn't know. We had to try. You see we had the great advantage of not having a public. You could try out anything. That gave us great freedom of experimentation."

CBS-TV turned to print journalism to see if those people could bring some prestige or credibility. Stan Smith was a popular sports writer on the New York *Daily News*. But Burger remembered Smith didn't come off as a serious news man on television, so his video stint didn't last long. Another print reporter spent a considerable amount of time in front of the CBS cameras. Tom O'Connor worked on the short-lived innovative New York newspaper, *PM*. Burger said the crew wanted to try a "working newsman" and O'Connor fit that personality. Burger said he was a shirt-sleeve reporter who would look at home at the city desk of an important newspaper. O'Connor brought a hard news tone to the newscast and became one of the more familiar faces on the CBS broadcast during that era.[313] But the fickle nature of the camera lens kept O'Connor from a long career on CBS-TV News. "He was lacking in—what should I say?—on-screen personality," said Burger. "He was just a straight newsman type. That's why he didn't survive. He was very well-liked and respected."

In the midst of watching so many different people present the news, Cassirer said the group gradually realized they were looking more for a specific personality, rather than

[313]For more on O'Connor's newspaper work, see Paul Milkman, *PM: A New Deal in Journalism, 1940-1948* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

body type or wardrobe. "It was only after awhile that everybody realized that the personality of the newscaster was very important," said Cassirer. "That his way of delivering or relating to the public, of motivating the public… he has to sell himself and the show." [314]

No Women Allowed

The CBS-TV people may have tried a variety of different people on the newscasts, but they didn't stray too far in their experimentation. All of the newscasters were white, and they were men. Burger said the concept of a woman newscaster on CBS, or other news organizations for that matter, didn't even merit consideration. "We never even thought about having a female face or voice in that culture and in that period," said Burger. "It was never even in our minds." Bendick remembered women could be heard on CBS radio, but they were mostly relegated to specialty programming or possibly live events. He said women weren't considered for on-air news positions.

Shirley Wershba, working at CBS radio news at the time, said given the culture at the time, even she didn't think women should be on the air presenting the news. "It was a given," said Wershba. "and you buy into it at that stage of the game. Would I believe a woman telling me the news? No, of course not, until it became a familiar thing. Once it becomes familiar, it's quite acceptable." Women had become more prominent in the CBS radio newsroom during the war as the men entered military service. Plus, Paul White taught a journalism class at Columbia University during this period. Wershba remembers that White would hire his students, often women, right from that class each semester. Still, those women rarely got an opportunity to go on the air.

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[314]Burger information on commentators from Chester Burger, interview with author, 11 May 2004, New York City, telephone interview, audiotape recording, (CB-OH3); other Burger quotes as well as Bendick and Cassirer quotes from interviews, (CB-OH2), (RB-OH1/2), (HC-OH).

Over on the television side, women filled important positions as well, but also mostly behind the scenes. People like Frances Buss, Lela Swift, Dorothya Claras and Mary Stack played various roles in the television operation. In 1948, radio news writer Alice Weel, another graduate of White's Columbia class, made the jump to television along with Douglas Edwards. Ruth Woodner appeared on-air as "mistress of ceremonies" in a segment called "Today's Woman" for a short-lived information program in 1946, *Saturday Evening Spotlight*.[315]

A person who paved the way for women on both radio and television news on the West Coast spent the first five years of her career at both CBS radio and television in New York. Paul White picked Ruth Ashton out of his Columbia journalism class in 1944. Ashton took full advantage of the opportunity. She worked as a writer for Robert Trout and handled a feature radio newscast for a time at CBS.

Murrow picked Ashton to be one of a select few producers who put together high-profile documentaries for CBS radio in the post-war period. Even though she would later become a familiar voice and face on Los Angeles airwaves, Ashton said she never thought about going on the air during her CBS years. "I didn't think about it, I didn't care," said Ashton, "…because there weren't any other women on in any place that we knew about. I guess in some small town someplace, there were some, but not in New York and not on the networks. Not doing news."

Ashton moved over to television with Douglas Edwards in time for the 1948 political conventions and election night coverage. She chose to leave CBS in 1949, not because she couldn't get on air, but because she wasn't allowed to do news. After the elections, Bob Bendick put her in charge of a new, weekly religious program which she

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[315]Burger, Shirley Wershba quotes from interviews, (CB-OH2), (SJW-OH2); Saturday Evening Spotlight from "Saturday Evening Spotlight…," CBS Press Release, 9 May 1946; TVB Stations N.Y. WCBS-TV History (WCBW); (CBS-RL).

named *Lamp Unto My Feet*.[316] Ashton remembered the show was well received and successful, "but everybody knew I hated doing it… ruined my life. I'm a journalist. I'm a reporter. I'm supposed to do those things."

She left CBS in early 1949 and settled back in her home state of California. Ruth Ashton Taylor became one of the most recognizable people on radio and television in Los Angeles through her work, first on KNX radio, and then on KNXT-TV (later known as KCBS-TV), until her retirement in 1989. [317]

House Guest

Not encumbered by gender or race questions, the crew concentrated on the personalities of the men who appeared before the cameras on CBS-TV news. For Burger, the breakthrough came when he started to think about where people were putting their television sets in their homes. "When you turn on this new television of yours, he's in your living room, and he should act like a guest in your living room," said Burger, "which means he shouldn't project his voice, he shouldn't yell at you, he should talk in a quiet, friendly, intelligent way and that seemed to go over best."

The intimacy of the home viewing experience had been an important finding in the CBS research of television viewing in 1944 and 1945. The researchers found people had different expectations from television as compared to other arenas. "In every test we conducted, one or more of the viewers has suggested, directly or indirectly, that expressions, gestures and costumes that are acceptable behind the footlights or on the screen will not be tolerated in the intimacy of the family living room." Given these

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[316]*Lamp Unto My Feet* proved to be one of the longest-running programs in network history. Ashton's creation stayed on the CBS-TV Sunday morning lineup until 1979, Castleman and Podrazik, 30-250.

[317]"I didn't think" quote from Ruth Ashton Taylor, interview with Shirley Biagi, Lincoln, CA, 16 November 1990, and Lamp Unto My Feet quote from Ruth Ashton Taylor, interview with Shirley Biagi, Lincoln, CA, 11 September 1991, both from Washington Press Club Foundation, (http://npc.press.org/wpforal/tay1.htm, 3 June 2003).

concerns and expectations, Douglas Edwards finally hit the right place at the right time in his CBS career.[318]

DOUGLAS EDWARDS: VIDEO SAVIOR OR NEWS LIGHTWEIGHT?

Douglas Edwards is both a heralded and tragic figure in CBS News history. Close to sixty years after he switched to television, his image is like a leaking boat swirling around the troubled seas of CBS Legend; riding high in the water for his gamble on television, pulled under by the condescending attitudes of some of his radio colleagues, turned around by jealousy of his television success, smashed into the rocks by his journalistic reputation, and steadied by his sheer longevity at the network.

For the television news crew searching to find the right person and personality for video news, Edwards became the physical embodiment of what the news team had learned through all of the on-air auditions. Edwards made his first appearance on WCBW-TV in June 1946. He had just returned from an overseas stint for CBS radio and came on the newscast to talk about his experiences. By April 1947, he had become one of the commentators who regularly fronted the newscasts. Bendick said Edwards seemed to be a natural for the new video environment. "It was a sense of sureness," remembered Bendick, "and a sense of experience in words. And he had very nice facial expressions and delivery."

In the days before the TelePrompTer,[319] handling the news on television wasn't easy. The commentator had to read the copy from a script in his hands, but he also had to maintain eye contact with the camera so the viewer wouldn't be stuck watching the top of

[318]Burger quote from interview, (CB-OH2); "in every test" from Katz and Dichter, 7.

[319]The TelePrompTer is a device that includes a screen placed directly in front of the camera but can't be seen by the viewer. The script for the newscast appears on the TelePrompTer screen, so the newscaster can read the script without taking his or her eyes off of the camera.

his head. At the same time, the newscaster had to keep an eye on the monitors to know when his face had been replaced by graphics, animation or film. When the director switched to film of a news event, the announcer needed to pace his presentation so the words on the script matched the pictures on the screen. And that was only when everything went according to the rundown. When something went wrong, which was quite frequently in early television, the newscaster then had to react quickly in professional manner without losing his composure.

For Burger, Edwards' personality off-camera came through during the broadcasts. "He was a very decent, friendly guy and he came through as a nice guy in your home and he clicked." During the 1950s, Philip Scheffler remembered Edwards for being "very smooth" and "unflappable." Edwards certainly fit the role of an invited guest in your living room.

Shirley Wershba worked with Edwards first in radio, and then later in television. She attributed his success on both media to his speaking style. "Smooth as silk and you never were concentrating on him as a person. You were listening to what he said because he said it so well. I noticed that years later when I worked with him in television… When anyone else would get on, you'd be aware of their style or intonations, inflections, how the hair was combed. With Doug, you just listened to what he had to say."[320]

Edwards continued to work on the television newscasts as an extra-curricular activity throughout 1947 and the first part of 1948. He was best known during this period as the commentator on CBS' popular *World News Roundup* radio newscast at 8:00 A.M. Monday through Saturday.

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[320]Bendick, Burger, Scheffler, and Shirley Wershba quotes from interviews, (RB-OH1/2), (CB-OH2), (PS-OH), (SJW-OH2).

For the television news crew at WCBS-TV, Douglas Edwards was one of the first of the popular radio commentators who didn't look down on the video efforts. His experience on CBS radio, as an announcer and a foreign correspondent, brought credibility to the broadcasts. But that wasn't Edwards' reputation throughout CBS News. Instead, he is now, rightly or wrongly, portrayed as a news lightweight, a photogenic face and personality who stumbled into video success because he lacked the intellectual depth of the Murrow Boys on radio. And one of the worst cuts of all in the CBS News culture, many insist Douglas Edwards wasn't even a "newsman."

Lesser Light

Edward R. Murrow resisted television for years because he didn't see it as a news medium. "TV is action, and it is mindless," said Murrow, struck by the need for visuals on television. He felt news was ideas, and you couldn't easily visualize ideas. Murrow and many of his followers worried that their journalistic talents, their insights, their experience wouldn't be appreciated by the "uncompromising reporter" known as the television camera. Therefore, television was trivialized. Radio provided an outlet for the serious reporter, television would be home to the showmen and actors. Enter Douglas Edwards. Either he fit the stereotype the radio reporters wanted to believe, or he was unfairly cast into that role. Most likely the reality is somewhere in the middle.

One relationship is quite clear. Douglas Edwards was *not* part of the Murrow inner circle. He may have covered at least part of the war for CBS radio, but the group always considered him an outsider. Larry LeSueur said Edwards couldn't be one of the Murrow Boys because he hadn't been with the likes of Murrow, Collingwood, Sevareid, Downs and the others through the dangerous war years: "We shared in the making of history in World War II; we knew what it was like to be scared together." Plus, they viewed Edwards as a mediocre writer, someone who couldn't pull off the well-crafted,

analytical radio pieces which had become the hallmark of the CBS News elite. CBS News President Sig Mickelson said Edwards was considered one of the "lesser lights" of the news staff.[321]

The snubs continued after television began to challenge radio for audience supremacy. In 1950, Murrow started a yearly tradition of bringing all the foreign correspondents together for an hour-long discussion of world affairs on both CBS radio and television. The inaugural *Years of Crisis* telecast became the first television appearance for many of the CBS radio reporters. Mickelson said he asked Murrow to include Edwards on the program the next year but Murrow refused. "He (Murrow) felt that Doug was unable to perform with the Hottelets and Collingwoods of this world." But Richard C. Hottelet, ever the diplomat, said Edwards' exclusion shouldn't be seen as a snub because the program was designed to highlight the knowledge of the foreign correspondents. "He wasn't excluded, there just wasn't a place for him," said Hottelet. "We had bureaus all over the place, five-to-six foreign bureaus; correspondents who lived with the stories and could come back to talk about them."

Hottelet, who is regarded as one of the Murrow Boys who made the easiest transition to television, said he had no problem with Edwards. "He was a very pleasant fellow--good reporter," remembered Hottelet. "We knew him from his anchoring of the radio roundup. …I always thought highly of Doug." But in the next breath, Hottelet reveals a hint of the Edwards legacy: "He was more of an anchorman than a reporter, but he did some reporting."[322]

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[321]Murrow quote from Schoenbrun, *On and Off the Air,* 53; "uncompromising reporter" from Edwin James, "Is Your Candidate Telegenic? New Hurdle Arises," *Broadcasting,* 12 April 1948, 27; LeSueur quote from Matusow, 55. Mickelson quote from Mickelson, *CBS in the 50s,* 10.

[322]Mickelson quote from Matusow, 53; Hottelet quote from interview, (RH-OH), more on Edwards exclusion from *Years of Crisis* from Mickelson interview, (SM-OH).

What Makes a Reporter?

Identifiers such as "journalist," "newsman," or "reporter" can mean everything and they can mean nothing. By nature of the First Amendment, there are no tests to determine who is a journalist and who is not. Freedom of speech and the press doesn't allow for obvious barriers or litmus tests to determine who can speak or write opinions and news stories. A reporter can't pass a test and put a diploma on a wall like a doctor or lawyer to prove status as a journalist. Therefore, the designations are self-defined or just as often, defined by peers. Because of the vague rules of entry into the journalistic club, even those on the inside have a hard time defining who is in or out. Many of the CBS news people of the 1940s point to their experience in writing or reporting the news as proof of their reporter status. But for Edwards, years in news broadcasting and reporting apparently wasn't enough to seal his reputation.

Douglas Edwards grew up in Ada, Oklahoma and became interested in radio at an early age. By the time he was 19, he was already a full-time news broadcaster and reporter on WSB radio in Atlanta. He also wrote for the company's newspaper, the *Atlanta Journal*. He next moved up to WXYZ radio in Detroit and became one of the "Cunningham News Aces," named for the sponsoring drug store. While at WXYZ, Edwards worked with fellow "News Ace" Mike Wallace. But the Detroit job involved more announcing than reporting, so in 1940 Edwards returned to WSB as assistant news editor. But he had also been listening to all the famous foreign correspondents covering the war in Europe and decided he needed to get to a radio network for a chance at similar work.

By the end of 1942, Edwards landed a job at CBS radio in New York. He came in as an announcer, but quickly convinced the bosses that he could write his own news stories. Edwards soon took over the popular 15-minute evening newscast, *World*

Tonight. Later, CBS finally let Edwards fulfill his dream of being a foreign correspondent, but he was a little late. CBS had planned on rotating Edwards through various foreign bureaus as vacation relief for the exhausted war reporters. But he didn't arrive in London until March 1945 when the fighting was almost over. Edwards became so disappointed that he had missed a chance at covering real battles that Murrow had to finally tell him, "Look, Doug, I know you're frustrated, but there's nothing in the least intellectual about getting shot at." Edwards worked out of the London bureau for the remainder of the war and then was sent to Paris.

Edwards later traveled 8,000 miles around the Middle East, reporting on Army Air Corps Communications installations in the region. He reported from Italy, Greece, Egypt, Turkey, Iran and Iraq during this period. After 14 months overseas, Edwards came back to New York and Murrow put him on the 8:00 AM daily news broadcast, *News of the World* (later renamed *World News Roundup*) in June 1946. [323]

Edwards may not have had the grand experiences of the Murrow Boys, but his news resume was still quite impressive. Based on experience alone, Edwards' career to that point certainly could match up favorably to anyone on the television side of CBS news. Yet still, even from some of the people over at CBS-TV news, who themselves complained about poor treatment from the CBS radio elite, Edwards is portrayed as more of a performer than a journalist.

Burger saw Edwards as the answer to their thoughts of the newscaster being a guest in the home because of his calm, friendly demeanor both on and off camera, yet…

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[323]Murrow quote from Matusow, 53; Edwards background from "Video News Dean," CBS Press Release, 1 April 1949; Misc. Photos Newsp. Articles Notes 2 of 2; (HC-CAH); "Douglas Edwards….," CBS Press Release, 14 June 1946; Unmarked File "40's"; (CBS-RL); "Edwards, Downs, Calmer, Jackson, Fowle Shifted in CBS News Staff Realignment," CBS Press Release, 20 August 1948; CBS News 1948 Press Releases; (CBS-RL); Mike Wallace and Gary Paul Gates, *Close Encounters: Mike Wallace's Own Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1984; New York: Berkley Books, 1985) 4-5; Matusow, 51-54.

"he didn't write the news, he wasn't much interested in the news, he didn't have anything to do with news judgment really." Even photographer Larry Racies, who thought people who called themselves journalists suffered from an "acute case of pretension," came away with an impression of Edwards as a news lightweight. "He was a southern gentleman, a very nice man," said Racies. "I wouldn't consider him a newsman, because he had no background in that. But he was good."

These perceptions of Edwards continued through the 1950s. John Hammerslough spent a few years on the assignment desk at CBS-TV news before moving onto a successful career in computers. While Hammerslough never considered himself a journalist, he didn't put Edwards in that category either. "I don't think Doug was much interested in the news," remembered Hammerslough. "I don't think he was much of a journalist. …He had the one big talent; he could read the news and he made it sound beautiful."

Philip Scheffler also started at CBS-TV news in the early 1950s, coming straight out of the Columbia University journalism program. Scheffler had a successful career at CBS News, culminating as Executive Editor of *60 Minutes* for many years. Scheffler is more specific than the others in how Edwards could be kept out of the journalist club, even with his experience: "I mean, I don't think we could send him out by himself to cover a story… *60 Minutes* correspondents are really reporters, I don't think he was really a reporter. He used to do a radio news program, but he was really more of a reader or presenter than the guys like Collingwood and Sevareid and Murrow and (Edward P.) Morgan who had actually been out reporting. Although Doug did some reporting during World War II. Anyway, he wasn't a hard-nosed reporter."

No one worked closer with Douglas Edwards on television for a longer period of time than Don Hewitt. Hewitt started in 1948 as Edwards emerged as the top candidate

for the permanent newscaster spot and worked alongside him until 1962 when Edwards lost his job to Walter Cronkite. Hewitt does not consider Edwards a newsman. "Douglas Edwards was the ultimate broadcaster, but unfortunately, not the ultimate journalist." No matter his later reputation, in the spring of 1948, Douglas Edwards emerged as the best newscaster for CBS at the very moment the station finally burst out of its New York City shell and emerged as an actual television network.[324]

MORE THAN JELLY BEANS

By the spring of 1948, television had become a juggernaut. The advancements, expansions, and impact created a momentum that raced far ahead of the manufacturer's ability to build, the government's ability to control, and the broadcaster's ability to satisfy. An editorial in *Broadcasting* magazine set the tone for the breakthrough year: "Television is destined to catch fire because of public demand. Lower priced sets are on the lines. The public usually gets what it wants. And TV is infectious."

In various cities around the country, owners were breaking ground on new stations, issuing commercial rate cards, and signing on the air with great fanfare. People lucky enough to live within the signal range of early stations snatched up sets as quickly as they went on sale. RCA, Du Mont and other manufacturers turned out close to 36,000 television sets in February alone. Philadelphia boasted 19,000 sets in use at the start of the year while Detroit had 6,000. By April, Milwaukee appliance stores had already sold 2,000 sets even though WTMJ-TV had just started broadcasting. New York doubled its number of television households in the first three months of the year.

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[324]Burger. Racies, Scheffler, Hammerslough quotes from interviews, (CB-OH2), (LR-OH2), (PS-OH), (JH-OH2); Hewitt quote from Hewitt, *Tell Me a Story,* 45.

The FCC realized it had been short-sighted in dismissing CBS' attempt to open up the UHF band for more channels in 1947. Just a year later, the agency was inundated with applications. By the end of April, 21 stations were on the air while 86 others had received permission to start construction. Still, the agency hadn't yet dealt with applications from 212 other companies that wanted to get in on video. New FCC Chairman Wayne Coy had to clean up the mess left to him when Charles Denny bolted to NBC after limiting post-war television to the VHF channels. At a convention of radio engineers, Coy pleaded with the group to work on UHF television: "If we cannot devise plans for a truly nation-wide competitive system of television for the next generation, we are not worth our salt."

The proliferation of television sets brought new ideas on how the medium would fit into society and what role it would play in everyday lives. One early hope centered on how television could keep young people out of trouble. Charles Feldman put a TV set in his candy store on New York's lower east side. He proudly told a reporter how he was fighting juvenile delinquency by keeping 40 to 50 kids off the street each night as they sat in his store watching television. In addition to the public service, Feldman also sold a lot of candy. In Chicago, WBKB-TV and the Chicago Cubs teamed up to "combat juvenile delinquency." They planned to blanket Chicago playgrounds with television sets during the baseball season so the kids could watch the Cubs. "Our aim is to keep the kids out of bars," said WBKB's Captain William Eddy, "and to discourage 'knotholing."[325]

For all of the stations going on the air and the thousands of sets being sold, the real future of television depended on the phone company. The American Telephone and

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[325]"infectious" quote from "TV-It's Infectious!," *Broadcasting,* 5 January 1948, 46; Coy quote from "TV's Future," *Broadcasting,* 29 March 1948, 15; candy store TV from "Another for Video," *Broadcasting,* 15 March 1948, 18; Cubs TV from "Playground TV," *Broadcasting,* 29 March 1948, 24, knotholing was a term to describe how people would avoid paying for a baseball ticket by peaking through fences or other openings at the ballpark.

Telegraph Company had been working on the enormous task of linking the country together by coaxial cable. This cable would allow not only for long distance phone calls, but also the ability for television stations to link together in a true network.

In March 1948, AT&T announced part of the coaxial system would be open for commercial business on May 1st. For $35 per airline mile between cities, a network could provide programming from one station to another for eight hours a day for a month, not counting other built-in charges. At that rate, a station in New York could send eight hours of programming every day in a month to a station in Philadelphia for just under $4 thousand, payable to Ma Bell. The AT&T coaxial cable plans, combined with other relay systems, would finally allow television stations to link together in a network system, much like the powerful radio networks.

Sending a live television signal from one city to another was certainly not a new development. RCA, Philco, and General Electric had been broadcasting to and from New York, Philadelphia and Schenectady throughout the 1940s. Plus, AT&T had been providing its existing coaxial cable as well as radio relay systems free of charge on specific occasions between Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington during previous years. But by offering a commercial service, AT&T now allowed companies to think of their television as a national service, even though the nationwide coaxial system would not be completed for a few more years.[326]

The promise of network television pushed competition between companies to new levels. During March, NBC, ABC, and CBS each claimed to have signed up the first television affiliate. NBC said its agreement with KSTP in St. Paul, Minnesota was "the first station affiliation contract in the history of television." A few days later, ABC announced WFIL-TV in Philadelphia as "the first independently-owned television station

[326]"AT&T Rates," *Broadcasting,* 29 March 1948, 13.

to sign a two-year contract as an affiliate of a national network." Not to be outdone, CBS followed up by saying WCAU-TV in Philadelphia had signed the "first actual television network affiliation contract in the history of American broadcasting."

Stations and networks engaged in a spiraling game of claiming television firsts, or television's biggest, or television's best. In February, CBS trotted out a piece of public relations that had worked in the past. When the network announced major reconstruction for the Grand Central Terminal studio, Frank Stanton said it would be "the largest television studio plant in the United States." Peter Goldmark had used the same approach in picking that location back in 1939 for the free publicity. But the folks over at WATV in Newark thought they were building the largest studio. When they checked the CBS measurements, they were sure. The WATV studio floor plan beat CBS by more than two thousand square feet. But once again, CBS would use the cavernous space at Grand Central for bragging rights. When taking into account the 45 foot ceilings above the train station, WCBS could boast of more cubic feet than WATV.

In March, Paley and Sarnoff engaged in a little friendly competition, just like the old days. When the musicians' union finally lifted a longtime ban on live performances on television, NBC announced it would present the first-ever televised live orchestra concert in two days. The Saturday evening event would feature Arturo Toscanini and the NBC Symphony Orchestra, the pride of Brig. Gen. Sarnoff. Paley turned to his new affiliate, WCAU-TV in Philadelphia, for help in deflating the moment. Instead of NBC, WCAU-TV presented the first live orchestra concert, featuring the Philadelphia Symphony, which was fed live to WCBS-TV in New York. The Philadelphia concert started at 5:00 PM, just 90-minutes before Toscanini lifted his baton over at NBC.[327]

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[327]first affiliate from "Columbia Television Network Signs WCAU-TV…," CBS Press Release, 25 March 1948; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL); "Stream of Firsts," *Broadcasting,* 5 April 1948, 30; "largest studio" from Bruce Robertson, "CBS Video," *Broadcasting,* 23 February 1948, 14; WATV-WCBS

CBS didn't just rely on stunts to push its television future. The company had shaken off its big defeat in color television from the previous year and attempted to regain its footing in the visual medium. When Stanton announced all the costly renovations at the Grand Central studios, he told reporters CBS was ready to spend whatever was necessary to be ready for network television. "We mean to be tops in television and you can't do that with jelly beans."

In April, Columbia brought 250 owners and top managers from their radio station network to New York. They were told to get in on television as soon as possible. A year before, CBS still spoke as if black-and-white television would never be accepted by the public. But now, Stanton said every index showed television to be on the "high upswing." He made it clear the network would be "driving under full power to the top." But CBS couldn't build a network without affiliates. Now the company had to depend on its loyal radio affiliates to build up the video side.

Within a week, CBS had snagged nine more television affiliates from amongst its radio network. CBS radio affiliates in cities including Cincinnati, Dayton, Indianapolis, Binghamton, New York, and Stockton, California had already secured the all-important construction permits and would soon be able to broadcast under the CBS umbrella. CBS had also added Baltimore to its group, which gave the network 12 signed affiliates. CBS could claim another first, the most television affiliates early in the game; even though most of the stations hadn't yet been built and wouldn't be located on the coaxial cable until some time in the future. The dozen affiliates helped hide the fact that CBS still had some work to do before it could secure outlets in such major cities as Washington D.C., Los Angeles and San Francisco.

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claims from "TV Studio Claims," *Broadcasting,* 15 March 1948, 91; first orchestra from "WCAU-TV…," CBS Press Release, 25 March 1948; CBS Television 1941-6/51;(CBS-RL); "Feature of the Week," *Broadcasting,* 29 March 1948, 10.

Now the race was on to get as many stations on the air and link as many cities as possible for a summer tradition which could prove to be the biggest showcase yet for the visual medium. And this time, the event wasn't a sporting event, but then again, maybe it was.[328]

[328]"jelly beans" quote from Robertson, "CBS Video;" CBS TV session and Stanton quotes from "TV Clinic," *Broadcasting,* 5 April 1948 27; new affiliates from "CBS TV Affiliates," *Broadcasting,* 12 April 1948, 26; "CBS Network Now Largest in Nation…," CBS Press Release, 12 April 1948; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL).

Chapter 7

The 1948 Conventions

Politicians and Journalists Meet the "All-Encompassing Eye"

THE SMALL SCREEN PREPARES FOR A LARGE EVENT

Philadelphia's Convention Hall could be a hot, sweltering place in the middle of the summer. By contrast, San Francisco might offer more pleasant temperatures for the important, grueling, marathon of picking a Presidential candidate. The Democratic National Committee had to make a choice on where to hold its 1948 political convention. Philadelphia, of course, always provided the great symbolism as the birthplace of the nation. But San Francisco offered more hotel rooms for the politicians, delegates, reporters, and other important people who would be part of the political process.

In the end, the Democrats chose the hall without air conditioning in the city with fewer hotel rooms. The Republicans made the same choice, as well as Henry Wallace's Progressive Party. Three out of the four political parties in 1948 chose Philadelphia's Convention Hall mainly for one reason—television.[329]

Philadelphia happened to be on the embryonic coaxial cable service that AT&T was starting to stretch across the eastern seaboard. The phone company had hopes of

[329]A group of Southern Democrats walked out of the Democratic convention because of the civil rights issue. They formed the short-lived States Rights party and nominated Strom Thurmond for President at a convention in Birmingham, Alabama, Bliss, 211-212; Philadelphia vs. San Francisco, Frank, *Out of Thin Air,* 8, more on Philly-TV choice for conventions from "TV is Factor in GOP's Convention Decision," *Broadcasting,* 28 April 1947, 20; "Democrats, Too, Weighing TV Potential for 1948 Convention, *Broadcasting,* 19 May 1947, 92; "Democrats Too Get Philadelphia Invite," *Broadcasting,* 2 June 1947, 50.

linking together several cities in time for the political conventions in June. Engineers from the various television stations started working on a plan for the most elaborate coverage in television history. They quickly decided on a pool arrangement since the stations didn't have enough equipment, and the Convention Hall didn't have enough space, for each channel to have its own multi-camera production. Plus, with the expensive coaxial cable rates unveiled that spring by AT&T, pool coverage would allow each station to share in the costs of getting the signal to the various cities. Each new city added to the live network meant a higher cable bill, but each station that joined the coverage cut the individual station costs.

The advance television team from the various stations and networks settled on a four-camera plan for Convention Hall. Each camera would be equipped with three separate lenses for a total of 12 different shots available for the director. A fifth camera would be located at the entrance of the hall so reporters could conduct interviews away from the noise of the floor.

Political leaders had mixed impressions on what television would mean for the political conventions. Edward Ingle of the Republican National Committee relished the exposure. Ingle predicted the convention would attract the "world's greatest assemblage of working radio and television personnel." John Redding, the Publicity Director for the Democratic National Committee felt the small screen might have to wait for the next campaign to have a lasting impact. "Television is in a position where in the next few years, it may take over from radio or newsreel coverage." Redding predicted the theater newsreels would provide the most important impact for politicians in 1948.

The presidential hopefuls also approached the coming of television with varying levels of interest. Just a few weeks before the convention, WCBS-TV borrowed a program idea from CBS radio, called *Presidential Timber*. CBS offered candidates a

half-hour of television time to present their case to the viewers. GOP candidate Harold Stassen appeared on the premiere episode May 27. Even though the program didn't begin until 9:00 PM, Stassen admitted he had been rehearsing since the early morning for the video opportunity. "My information is that the television audience is increasing rapidly. I believe that television will have an important effect on the 1948 campaign and election." As a dark horse candidate, Stassen could use the reach of the *Presidential Timber* program which ran not only in New York, but also Washington D.C., and Baltimore.

One of the favorites for the Republican nomination, Robert Taft, didn't place such importance on the advance video publicity. Taft cancelled an early June appearance on *Presidential Timber* in order to campaign in the South before the convention. The Ohio Republican might have been better served by accepting all the television practice possible. Before the conventions, one television veteran rated Taft as one of the shakiest performers on video, saying his appearances had been "unemotional to the point of tedium."

Television and political experts speculated on which candidates would benefit most from a televised convention. President Truman had the most experience, since his Presidency had witnessed so many television firsts. According to *Broadcasting* writer Edwin James, "(a)lthough he could hardly be regarded seriously for an Academy Award, he does, according to the experts, manage to convey sincerity and determination, two qualities invaluable to any candidate." Thomas Dewey was described as "the man on a wedding cake" while viewers chided Douglas MacArthur for his bad comb-over: "If that gold headpiece ever blew off during a television show…he'd be dead." Overall, politicians were warned that the time-honored stump speech method of dramatic gestures

and a booming voice wouldn't work on the small screen. "You can't get by…by haranguing on television. Your audience is three people in a living room."[330]

WELCOME TO THE GOLDFISH BOWL

Those three people start to add up when the living rooms across the East Coast are linked together by live television. By the time the Republican Convention began in Philadelphia on June 21, 1948, 17 stations in 9 cities could present the speeches, votes, and interviews as they happened. Viewers in Philadelphia, up to New York, New Haven, Newark, Boston and Albany-Schenectady, and down to Baltimore, Washington D.C., and Richmond for the first time could watch a live political event collectively. Set manufacturers had been increasing production to try and match demand throughout the first half of the year. In May alone, more than 50 thousand sets were sent to retailers, at a rate of close to 13 thousand a week.

Television optimists quickly boasted of 10 million viewers[331] during the Republican Convention. Even though that number was grossly inflated, it has been stamped into history by repeated references over the years. George Gallup's company, Audience Research Inc., estimated a total of 358 thousand television sets in the country in the week before the Republican convention, including 40 thousand in bars and other public places. Plus, tens of thousands of those sets were located in Chicago, Los

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[330]Convention site debate from Frank, *Out of Thin Air,* 8; Ingle and Redding quotes from Herman Brandschain, "Politics," *Broadcasting,* 17 May 1948, 54-B; Stassen quote from "Stassen Sees TV's Role in Upcoming Elections," *Broadcasting,* 7 June 1948, 61; Taft cancellation from "Taft TV Postponed," *Broadcasting,* 7 June 1948, 56; politician critiques from James, "Is Your Candidate Telegenic?"

[331]The 10 million audience estimate actually predates the conventions themselves. In April, James Carmine of Philco used that number in a prediction of convention interest, "10,000,000 Viewers For Polit. Confabs—Carmine," *Variety,* 28 April 1948, 30; *Broadcasting* then used the number in an article on the coverage, Herman Brandschain, "GOP Coverage," *Broadcasting,* 28 June 1948, 21, the *New York Times* repeated the number in its coverage, R.W. Stewart, "The Convention Via Video," *New York Times,* 27 June 1948, sec. 2, p. 9, and the number has been used in various publications over the years including Bliss, 212, and Crotts, 90-93.

Angeles, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Buffalo, St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis-St. Paul; cities which would have to wait for coaxial cable lines to reach their cities before they could experience live network television. Many of those stations offered highlights of the conventions from film flown in from Philadelphia each day.

The viewer size exaggeration can't take away from the importance of the moment; the 1948 political conventions were witnessed by the largest television audience in history up to that point. Herman Brandschain in *Broadcasting* noted the radio and television coverage turned Convention Hall into "a gigantic goldfish bowl in which every significant development could be heard and seen in cities, hamlets and farms across the country. The coverage was hailed a virtual revolution in electronics reporting." [332]

Television also provided a level of convention coverage that had never been attempted, even by radio. Timing and economics played a bigger part in the length of coverage than civic duty. Radio had avoided full coverage of conventions because the audio airwaves were too valuable to the station owners. Radio stations would take a financial bath if commercials and entertainment programs were stripped away in favor of full convention coverage. But in 1948, television didn't yet have the burden of a full day of sponsored programming. Plus, the stations were already paying for a pool video feed which included gavel-to-gavel coverage of each day's proceedings, no matter how many hours they chose to use. To reduce costs, stations could shut down their main studios during the duration of the conventions.

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[332]TV cities on coaxial from "TV Convention Pool," *Broadcasting,* 31 May 1948, 27; TV sets from "TV Receiver Output Up 38% Over First Quarter, *Broadcasting,* 28 June 1948, 74; 10 million sets and "goldfish bowl" from Brandschain, "GOP Coverage," 21; Gallup numbers from "TV Sets," *Broadcasting,* 5 July 1948, 61.

Boxing and Puppets Prevail

Some video offerings couldn't be ignored, not even for democracy in action. The Republicans complained, but NBC switched away anyway on the night of June 23rd for an event which played a bigger role in television history: boxing. The network presented the Joe Louis-Jersey Joe Walcott championship fight that night, then ran filmed highlights of the convention after the final bell. NBC certainly pleased the video audience by choosing boxing over politics. The C.E. Hooper Inc. ratings firm estimated that 86.6 percent of all television sets on the East Coast network were tuned to the eleventh round Louis knockout of Walcott, the highest percentage of sets tuned to one program in radio and television history.

Plus, NBC preempted political coverage on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 5:00 PM for early television sensation *Howdy Doody*. But that program might count as political programming since *Howdy Doody* had declared he was running for president as well. The puppet campaign might have been a joke, but the response proved to be one of the early instances of the power of television. Host Buffalo Bob Smith innocently offered free *Howdy Doody* campaign buttons for the asking. NBC was swamped with close to 60,000 requests.[333]

Technical Hoop Jumping

The pool coverage plan did create headaches for the networks and stations that wanted to feature their own newscasters during the conventions. AT&T offered two video signals for the political coverage. One line was reserved for the constant video pool feed of whatever was happening in the hall at that moment. The second video signal

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[333]boxing match from "Louis-Walcott Win Coverage Skirmish," and *Howdy Doody* from "Puppet's New Look," *Broadcasting,* 14 June 1948, 40,68; ratings from "As Seen by 6,000,000," *Newsweek,* 12 July 1948, 55; more *Howdy Doody* from "Howdy," *Time,* 5 April 1948, 63 and "The Vanishing Puppet," *Time,* 21 June 1948, 77.

was offered to the networks for their own individual coverage in individual increments. Under that arrangement, ABC might feature Martin Agronsky from 6:45 PM to 7:00 PM. But right at the top of the hour, the special feed could switch to John Cameron Swayze from NBC. These times would have to be chosen in advance.

For Bob Bendick, in charge of CBS television coverage, the planning involved spirited backroom negotiations. "The representatives from CBS, NBC, and Du Mont would have to meet with the telephone company and divvy up the time that they would get on the cable, so we always tried to outwit each other. 'Who's going to speak between 7:30 and 7:45? Because we want the cable for that time.' …Whenever there was an important speaker, we all wanted the same time, but we compromised. That was an interesting way of covering news or the limitations of it." [334]

CBS RADIO NEWS MEETS TELEVISION

The 1948 political conventions have an important place in 20th Century American history because they intersect multiple interests and institutions. For political scholars, the conventions included drama and important social issues which could be witnessed by people outside of the hall for the first time. For media historians, the conventions happened just as network television began and a substantial number of sets had diffused to at least part of the population. The importance of the summer events in the short history of broadcast news is obvious. But for many radio newscasters, the 1948 political conventions symbolize something more: in that stifling hot building in Philadelphia, many for the first time came face to face with the reality of television.

[334]Bendick quote from interview, (RB-OH1/2).

For the CBS radio news people, television could no longer be conveniently ignored ten blocks away above a train station. Now they were shoulder-to-shoulder with people they hardly knew who worked for the same company. Many of these television people actually considered themselves reporters, just like radio newscasters. To make it worse, some of the radio people, including Murrow, had to swallow their pride and do a little work for the video side.

Television certainly didn't overshadow radio at the conventions. While the multiple cameras, miles of snaking cables, and the dozens of technicians may have created an overpowering scene inside the hall, in the end those television broadcasts were only being seen on about 300 thousand sets while radio could reach 66 million receivers across the country. But for many in the radio crew, that small screen medium that they had ignored, avoided, or ridiculed now had to be considered. In fact, Edward Ingle of the Republican National Committee predicted before the convention that many viewers would watch the conventions just to get a first look at their favorite radio news commentators.

Frank Stanton may have had that thought in mind when he had to beg both Murrow and Eric Sevareid to appear with Douglas Edwards on television during the 1948 Republican National Convention. It's hard to believe today the president of a major media corporation practically getting down on his knees to convince a few of his employees to contribute to a medium which had already proven itself as a coming force in the country; but that moment reveals how Murrow and some of his people felt about television at the time.

The radio newscasters may have been needed on television for more than their star power. They had to help fill the time. As was often the case in early television, the crew had its hands full just trying to solve all of the technical logistics necessary to

provide gavel-to-gavel coverage. What would happen in front of those cameras didn't always get enough attention. While CBS radio news had a detailed plan, undoubtedly crafted and adapted from previous election years, Douglas Edwards didn't even know he would be leading the television coverage until he arrived in Philadelphia.

Over at NBC, the scene was just as chaotic. *Life* magazine sponsored NBC's convention coverage as a way to promote the magazine and get some of its reporters a little face time. Three days before the start of the convention, publisher Andrew Heiskell stopped by the Convention Hall just to see how his money was being spent. Only then did he realize the entire NBC television crew had been waiting for Heiskell, a magazine publisher, to present the television coverage plans.[335]

Before the conventions, Ruth Ashton had been one of the first people to switch over from CBS radio to television. She had worked closely with Edwards, so when he started spending more time over in television, she followed. Ashton quickly learned her drop in status when she joined Edwards at the convention. "We were nothings. We sat in a hot, little booth in the corner of the bleachers and there were big fancy studios and booths for the radio folks." Ashton said she hid a bottle of scotch in a knitting bag to help the two of them survive the heat and tedium of the long days in the convention hall.

Joe Wershba got his first real look at his network's television operation in Philadelphia, even though he'd been working on the radio side for more than three and a half years. He remembered the stifling heat in the Convention Hall which was made worse by the television and newsreel lights. He said politicians would trudge up the steps to the small interview room. They were sweating profusely and then would be taken into a small room which was air conditioned to keep the equipment cool. Wershba was sure

[335]Noel Jordan of NBC says Heiskell is exaggerating his role at the 1948 conventions. Jordan said Francis McCall and Ad Schneider from NBC News were involved with the convention coverage and handled the plans. Jordan says *Life* provided the contacts and some of the coverage ideas. Kisseloff, 361.

someone would come down with pneumonia under those conditions. "I remember Alben Barkley, when he was picked by Truman to be his Vice Presidential running mate. He came in, this big powerful-looking man, pouring sweat. I turned my back saying, 'we're killing the man.' Fortunately nobody died. Then I knew what television was."

The conventions brought Bob Skedgell back in the presence of the intimidating technology that had defined his early writing career. Skedgell stayed away from television after his stint as writer on the original 1941 newscasts. At the 1948 conventions, he was working as a writer and editor for CBS radio news. He said his radio brethren had good reason to limit the amount of time they worked on the television coverage. When the reporters worked on the convention floor for CBS-TV, they had to wear heavy backpacks for all the equipment necessary to conduct television interviews. "I remember Ed Murrow being out on the floor with all the equipment they had to carry," said Skedgell. "That was one problem they didn't like. …It was a terribly hot place, with no air conditioning in the Philadelphia Convention Hall, and Murrow would come back to the control room absolutely drenched with perspiration and they didn't like the idea of cluttering themselves with this stuff and carrying it around. They didn't like that at all." Another CBS reporter, John Daly, said he used two seersucker suits because of the heat and the heavy television pack. "I wore one suit in the afternoon and then, before the evening session, I would go back to the hotel, shower, soak the suit I'd just worn and change into the other."

Bob Bendick, the person in charge of CBS television coverage, insists the stories of chaotic working conditions and resistance from the radio newscasters have been exaggerated over the years. He felt the 1948 conventions signaled a breakthrough in relations between the two news camps at CBS. "I'd get together with Ted Church (CBS Radio News Director) and say, 'look there's going to be a great session with so-and-so

speaking, or Harry Truman's going to be up (in the television booth) and we need some stature, can we have some of your people?' Murrow was fairly amenable to coming on or doing a spot…. They began to recognize that this was the medium of the future and they'd better get interested in it."

Since the events were the first attempt of television coverage on such a large scale, many of the mistakes were made during the Republican Convention, which allowed for a smoother operation when the Democrats arrived a few weeks later. At CBS, the lessons learned during the first convention caused the network to settle on a three-person television newscaster crew for the Democrats: Edwards, Murrow and Quincy Howe. Jack Gould of the *New York Times* applauded the effort of the CBS team. Gould considered the trio "very much in a class by itself" for "straight adult reporting" of the Democratic convention. "In a town overrun with eager beavers, the Messrs. Murrow, Howe and Edward acted as relaxed and seasoned reporters."

Radio reporters weren't the only news people confronting television close-up for the first time. Another reason the 1948 televised conventions received so much attention, especially in the print media, was personal. Print reporters not only watched the television circus from a distance, many had to confront the process themselves. *Life* magazine was responsible for the NBC coverage on television so those reporters got a full immersion in the video world. Plus, *Newsweek* reporters worked both on their print stories and also on the Du Mont network television coverage.

Veterans of the dignified press quickly got caught up in the world of television. One reporter bragged that while other networks relied on Hollywood make-up men, "*Newsweek* and Du Mont relied only on good lighting." That same reporter became enchanted with the job of the television director. He proudly wrote the *Newsweek*-Du Mont coverage was the most effective because of Director James Caddington's use of

close-up shots during roll calls. "…the big cameras ranged back and forth between rostrum and floor to pick up delegates as they called their state's vote—providing televiewers with a better conception of the show than was gotten by anybody in the hall."[336]

ACTUAL NEWS AND DRAMA FOR THE CAMERAS

Because of the novelty of television coverage, people were easy to forgive the medium for wrong camera shots and occasional confusion. But the medium was also helped by the fact that political conventions still provided surprises, drama, and actual news during this era. For the Republicans, they didn't know who their candidate would be when the coverage began on June 21st. Thomas Dewey, New York Governor, came to Philadelphia as a favorite, but he had been defeated by Roosevelt four years earlier. Dewey faced strong challenges from veteran senator Robert Taft of Ohio and upstart Harold Stassen, who defeated Dewey in a few early primaries.

From Monday through Thursday, while politicians and supporters made speeches from the podium at the Convention Hall, operatives for the top candidates worked behind the scenes to win delegates. News people raced between the convention floor and local hotels where many of the negotiations took place, trying to score exclusives on the constantly changing scenario. Reporters had done this type of legwork at conventions for years. But now, each new slice of information could mean a brief moment of glory through instantaneous television. While the Republican choice was still in question,

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[336]Ingle comment from Brandschain, "Politics;" Stanton begging Murrow and Sevareid as well as Edwards TV role from Cloud and Olson, 285; NBC-*Life* convention plans from Frank, *Out of Thin Air,* 12-14; Ashton comments from interview, (RAT-OH2); Gould review from Jack Gould, "Television and Politics," *New York Times,* 18 July 1948, sec. 2, p. 7; Wershba, Skedgell, Bendick, Hottelet quotes from interviews, (SJW-OH2), (RS-OH2), (RB-OH2), (RH-OH); Daly quote from Bliss, 210; Newsweek-Du Mont coverage from "Television Score," *Newsweek,* 26 July 1948, 52.

CBS's Larry LeSueur got a tip and wandered over to the California delegation, which was huddled around Senator William Knowland. Live on radio and television, Knowland announced the delegation had just switched allegiance to Dewey. CBS viewers found out about the major turn of events at the same moment as the top politicians. Each network could boast of similar scoops throughout the conventions.

Dewey won on the third ballot and promptly chose Earl Warren of California as his running mate. After accepting the nomination, Governor Dewey had his smiling picture taken, flanked by his wife, his two young boys, and…a television set.

Democrats Also Provide Drama

Many Democrats hoped for some intrigue and competition when they arrived for their convention in Philadelphia in July. Few believed President Harry Truman could actually win an election in the fall. The Republicans had already taken both the House and Senate, and a Truman nomination was sure to give the Presidency to the GOP as well. Coming into the convention, some party leaders still held out hope that war hero Dwight Eisenhower would join the party as a Presidential candidate, even though the general had said no about as many ways possible. WCAU-TV newscasters in Philadelphia scored an exclusive when they interviewed Democratic Senator Claude Pepper who had just received a telegram from Ike that read he definitely would refuse to run for President that year.

With Eisenhower out of the picture, Truman became the only choice for the reluctant party. At one point during the roll call, the Convention Hall became so hot that the President and his wife stepped outside and sat down on the ramp to cool off. Not missing an opportunity to curry favor with the President and promote his company, Frank Stanton promptly brought down two portable television sets, one for Harry and one for his wife Bess, each tuned to CBS.

Another attempt by Truman to beat the heat ended in some frantic moments for the CBS crew. Truman had trudged up to the CBS television room and was waiting for his interview. Bob Bendick said they opened a door to the outside to bring in a breeze. "He was sitting there kind of cooling off and he was watching us operate and all of a sudden there were two shots. Of course, Secret Service people were with him, they made their moves, and he ducked." After a quick search outside, they realized the sounds didn't come from a gun, but instead from the railroad yard next to the Convention Hall.

Video Power and Ethics

With the Truman nomination assured, attention was then directed towards the fight over the Democratic Party platform. Proponents of civil rights legislation wanted the Democrats to highlight that issue at the convention, while southern Democrats and others strongly resisted those efforts. The passion, bitterness, and uncertainty of the civil rights debate at the Democratic convention provided the drama that had been missing without a nomination fight.

Early in 1948, Truman had unveiled a civil rights program that included the protection of black voting rights, an anti-lynching proposal, a permanent commission on Civil Rights, and the abolishment of poll taxes. Then Truman dared the Republican-controlled Congress to pass these reforms. But when it came time to craft a civil rights plank for the Democratic Party convention, Truman supported a watered-down version of his civil rights plan to placate important Southern senators such as Richard Russell of Georgia. But some of the more liberal members of the party felt the time had come to take a strong stand on the civil rights issue and they pushed for some of the very same issues in Truman's original program to be adopted at the convention.

Finally, the mayor of Minneapolis and a candidate for the Senate, Hubert Humphrey, got up to give the speech that catapulted him into the national spotlight for

the rest of his career. Humphrey took the huge risk of going against the President and urging the delegates to vote for a tougher civil rights platform. "There will be no hedging, and there will be no watering down, if you please, of the instruments and the principles of the civil rights program. My friends, to those who say that we are rushing this issue of civil rights, I say we are 172 years late." Humphrey's eight minute speech ignited the delegates and they voted for the stronger civil rights plank

What happened next in front of the television cameras sparked early ethics debate on television's role as a news medium. After the civil rights vote, all of the Mississippi delegates and half from Alabama walked out of the convention in protest. An alert member of the NBC-*Life* team promptly rounded them up and brought them to the makeshift studio for interviews. After an interview with NBC's Ben Grauer, the delegates stood in front of the cameras and on cue, took off their badges and threw them on a table. In case some people didn't pick up on the fact that the badge toss was staged, they took them off again on cue and once again threw the credentials on the table. The idea of staging motion for the cameras was nothing new for the newsreels. People would be asked to repeat actions so the cameramen could get the same motion from a different angle. Then the two angles could be edited together as a matched-action edit, a common practice in motion pictures and newsreels. But this event took place on live television, while the visual medium was working side by side with radio and print brethren, covering one of the most important political events in our country every four years. The credential toss became the talk of the press corps covering the conventions. At the post-convention press party, Murrow tracked down *Life's* Andrew Heiskell and berated the magazine

publisher for the staged event, saying it threatened the integrity and future of television news.[337]

Even without staging any events, both people in the industry and those watching the video screen for the first time realized over the course of the coverage that political conventions would never be the same. Bob Bendick said he discovered with a choice of three or four camera shots at any time, a television director had a lot of power in determining how the event would be perceived. "If you showed a bunch of delegates nodding away or reading a newspaper, the impression that you got is that it's pretty dull stuff, which in a way it was. Here was the most important event of politics, the election of a President, and…depending on how you directed your cameras to pick up various things, you could make a different impression whatsoever. So that was a learning lesson which continued always."

Lasting Impact of 1948 Convention Coverage

The politicians noticed the television effect immediately. After the Republican event, Kenneth Fry of the Democratic National Committee issued a memorandum for all speakers and state delegation chairmen coming to Philadelphia for the Democratic convention: "Do not forget at any time that the merciless and all-encompassing eye is on the Convention floor, the platform—and everywhere. The camera shifts instantly and often." Fry advised speakers to talk into the cameras as well as to the crowd and asked the delegates to avoid yawning, reading the newspaper, "and other evidences of

[337]LeSueur reporting from "Sidelights," *Broadcasting,* 28 June 1948, 76; Dewey TV photograph from *Broadcasting,* 28 June 1948, 21; WCAU beat from "Philly Coverage," *Broadcasting,* 19 July 1948, 66; Bendick quote from interview, (RB-OH2); civil rights fight and Humphrey quote from Robert Mann, *The Walls of Jericho: Lyndon Johnson, Hubert Humphrey, Richard Russell, and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (San Diego: Harvest Book, 1996), 1-46; staging credential toss and Murrow reaction from Frank, *Out of Thin Air,* 23-26.

boredom." The stakes couldn't be higher as evidenced on how he closed out the memo: "Our attention to these points means votes."

While others looked to the opening of the network, the proliferation of television sets around the country, or even the drama of the proceedings as reasons why television made such a mark in the summer of 1948, young CBS associate director Don Hewitt believed the coverage worked for another reason. He compares a political convention to the other event television handled so well in the early years: sports.

> "The reason we did them (sports) was because the cameras got in one spot. We knew what time the game was going to be played, we knew what time it was going to start, we knew when it would finish. We knew how long it would run. It was easy. Along comes a political convention and I'm saying to myself, hey, we know the date it's going to start, we know what time they're going to meet everyday, we know what time they will get through at night, we know where we can put the cameras. The hall's already lit for us. It was like covering a football game. It's easy. It's the first time that television could be at a big event and didn't feel crowded out by radio's ability to move into places we couldn't move."

For some people with long memories and old television sets, the 1948 conventions weren't the beginning of televised politics, just a continuation of the growth and importance of a medium which had been struggling with an identity and a purpose for several years. Radio and television critic John Crosby of the *New York Herald-Tribune* had such a background and noted the progress with deep sarcasm: "I may be one of the few surviving humans who saw the 1940 Republican convention televised on the old 441-line television sets. As I recall, there were great stretches of that broadcast during which we were presented with the spectacle of an empty table flanked by two empty chairs. In this one, they succeeded in putting people in the chairs, and by 1952 the people in the chairs may conceivably have something of interest to say."

Political conventions, for better or worse, would never be the same after the 1948 conventions. Television learned how to make its coverage smoother and easier to follow

with each successive presidential campaign. But the political parties did the same. They realized the chaos, the fighting, the spirited debates—long a hallmark of conventions—didn't present the proper image on television. They wanted the viewers to see a cohesive, united, excited party. The changes might have started small, with attention to yawning and newspapers, but eventually the conventions were smoothed out, with the flaws hidden and the wrinkles brushed away. But by presenting a more unified front, the parties took the excitement; took the news out of the conventions. Plus, with the rising importance of the primaries, the drama of choosing a candidate started happening out on the primary campaign trail, not at the political conventions. Still, the television networks trotted out the heavy equipment and the big names every four years, partly for broadcast news bragging rights, partly out of civic duty, and mostly because they knew how, even long after the conventions ceased to be major news events.[338]

CBS FINALLY CHOOSES A PERMANENT TV NEWSCASTER

Another shorthand, misleading version of the development of television news at CBS involves both the "anchor as star" frame as well as the importance of the conventions. In this story, the CBS top brass noticed the impact of the political coverage on television and decided to follow up with a nightly newscast. Plus, since Douglas Edwards had handled himself so well during the conventions, he would be the choice to front the new newscast. By conveniently packaging Edwards with the birth of nightly news after the conventions, the contributions and efforts of everyone involved in CBS-TV news up to that point are erased as if they never happened or had no impact on what was to follow.

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[338]Bendick and Hewitt quotes from interviews, (RB-OH2), (DH-OH2); Democratic memo from "TV Important," *Broadcasting,* 19 July 1948, 62; Crosby quote from John Crosby, *Out of the Blue: A Book About Radio and Television* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), 242.

CBS-TV News actually expanded to five nights a week in May 1948, after AT&T opened up the coaxial cable for the eastern seaboard and before the political conventions. Douglas Edwards had already established himself as the main television newscaster by that time, even though he may not have been officially named the permanent commentator until later in the year. Instead of a convenient starting date for both Edwards and nightly news, the two events happened as a natural progression of the television newscasts which had been evolving and expanding for years.

But what did happen after the conventions is that Edwards had to commit to a full-time television career and leave most of his radio work behind. Frank Stanton needed to convince Edwards that television was the future. The main issues involved money and prestige. Even while Edwards was handling the television news and the convention coverage, his main income still came from radio. CBS radio listeners knew Douglas Edwards from his six-day-a-week 15-minute newscast at 8:00 AM, *World News Roundup,* as well as his brief newscast during the noontime *Wendy Warren with the News* programs. Sponsors paid for those broadcasts, which brought Edwards' weekly paycheck up to $400. Television couldn't match that kind of sponsor money, but Stanton agreed to double his base radio salary with promises of three times his radio salary when television reached a wider audience.[339]

Shirley Wershba remembered Edwards agonizing over the decision. At CBS radio news, he had one of the most popular newscasts. But at the same time, he would always be competing for airtime with the celebrated Murrow Boys who definitely didn't

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[339]Examples of newscast after convention frame from Mickelson interview, (SM-OH); Matusow, 50, Frank, 31, Bliss, 222, CBS News, *Television News Reporting*, 8, Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty,* 102; CBS expanded the newscast to five nights a week during the week of May 10, 1948, Radio-TV listings, *New York Times,* 9 May 1948, sec. 2, p. 10; other references to pre-convention daily newscasts from "CBS Television Programs," CBS Sales Release, September 1948, and "Video News Dean," CBS Press Release, 1 April 1949, both from Misc. photos, newspaper articles, notes 2 of 2; (HC-CAH), and Castleman and Podrazik, 29; Stanton-Edwards negotiations from Schoenbrun, 55, Cloud and Olson, 287, Matusow, 50-51.

consider Edwards to be in their league. But what if television doesn't develop as a news medium? "I mean what if nothing came of this?" said Wershba. "It was that kind of fearful attitude. Really it's like going up to space for the first time." Edwards made the jump, but hung onto his brief radio newscast in *Wendy Warren with the News*. Plus, he convinced one of the radio news writers, Alice Weel, to come over to television with him.[340]

TELEVISION NEWS WOULD NEVER BE THE SAME

Douglas Edwards proved during the conventions that he could handle live news coverage in addition to his work in the studio. But Edwards wasn't the only member of the CBS-TV crew to make a strong impression at the conventions. One of the newest members of CBS-TV news provided the first signs of the brash, innovative, fearless, and insightful style that would continue through more than a half-century of television news leadership. His innate sense of the power of the video screen merged with a news background resulted in some of the most important innovations in early television news.

But at the 1948 political conventions, Don Hewitt had just started his television career. Officially, he operated as the associate director of the convention coverage. Richard C. Hottelet and some of the other radio reporters first noticed Hewitt standing next to a camera in Philadelphia trying to convince politicians and other dignitaries to agree to televised interviews. "We watched bemusedly," said Hottelet. "There was Hewitt, saying 'Here I am in my bar mitzvah suit getting people in front of a camera. What kind of job is this when you guys are out working?'"

Hewitt did show a flash of what was to come for CBS-TV news at the conventions. The incident is small and fairly insignificant in the midst of the important

[340]Wershba quote from interview, (SJW-OH2).

political decisions being made, but showed Hewitt's flair for the dramatic and visual side of the news. During the Democratic Convention, India Edwards of the party's women's division gave a speech on inflation. Since the Republicans controlled Congress she wanted to warn voters of higher prices if the GOP also took the Presidency. Her speech was a visual feast; a highlight for the cameras. First Edwards opened a box, letting out helium-filled balloons which signified where prices would be going if the Republicans triumphed. Then she brought a little girl on the stage, Sally, and ticked off the prices of everything the youngster was wearing. Finally, Edward pulled a steak and a carton of milk out of the box and waved them in front of the cameras and delegates to warn of higher prices under Republican leadership.

During this speech, the NBC-*Life* crew scored a political scoop by lining up Senator Alben Barkley who had been gaining momentum as a vice presidential choice. The interview was exclusive, but Barkley had little to tell the audience. Meanwhile, CBS stuck with Edwards and her inflation show-and-tell. After the speech, Hewitt noticed the woman had left the props up on the podium. So he raced down the stairs, through the delegates section, and up to the dais to grab the steak and carton of milk. He brought them up to the CBS booth and handed them to Murrow who showed them to the television audience during his recap of the inflation speech. "I figured if you steal stuff and give it to Ed, it cleanses the process. Ed thought it was great. He said, 'hot damn.'"

Hewitt did more than steal props and convince people to appear on television. He became immersed so completely in the television coverage that his fellow workers quickly knew Hewitt needed a more important role in the operation. Henry Cassirer remembered Hewitt as a natural in presenting the convention on television and that he "took stature" within CBS during those events. Chet Burger, who had already been with CBS-TV news for more than two years when the political conventions began, said

Hewitt's potential was obvious from the start. "It wasn't more than three months before it was obvious that he had ability on an order of magnitude higher than any of the rest of us. He had imagination. He had vitality. He saw things we never dared to see." [341]

Hewitt quickly was promoted to director to work with Fred Rickey. Soon, he would be sharing the directing duties on the newscast with Franklin Schaffner. Schaffner later moved back to dramatic programs on CBS, and eventually out to Hollywood. Hewitt had emerged as the best and brightest director for television news.[342]

Plus, Hewitt's enthusiasm and curiosity caused the young industry to once again re-think the job titles. Television news is often separated into the editorial side and the technical side. The newscast director usually isn't involved in the editorial side of the news. Instead, the director usually takes over after the news is written and the story order is determined. The director is then responsible for turning that story rundown into a live broadcast; utilizing the cameras, film projectors, graphics and other tools available to the news studio crew. But in the early days of television news, those lines weren't so firmly drawn. Henry Cassirer tried directing, in addition to his news editor's duties, but found he didn't have the skills necessary to marshal a fast-paced live production.

Don Hewitt not only proved to be the best person to prepare and execute a complicated newscast on live television, but he was also heavily involved on the editorial side as well. After a short period of time, Hewitt became the most dominant person on both the editorial and technical side of the newscasts. Since he was not just a director, and not just a news editor, he needed a different title. Eventually, someone took a job

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[341]Hottelet, Burger quotes from interviews, (RH-OH), (CB-OH2); Hewitt prop quote from Kisseloff, 380; India Edwards speech information from Kisseloff, 380, and Frank, *Out of Thin Air,* 20-21.

[342]CBS News President Sig Mickelson noticed Hewitt's great ability to direct live broadcasts at the 1952 political conventions, just a year after Mickelson had taken over as head of news. Mickelson said Hewitt was "absolutely brilliant" in anticipating what would happen next and which camera to use during the marathon broadcasts, Mickelson interview, (SM-OH).

title from Hollywood, "producer," and brought it over to television to describe what Hewitt was doing. In later years, most newscast producers would shed the directing responsibilities, but Hewitt filled both jobs for CBS-TV news for many years.

Hewitt brought energy, excitement, and promise to the television newscast. He was loud, frenetic, and in command when the newscast deadline approached or a new idea had caught his attention. He took a leadership role in the news story meetings and had an uncanny knack of coming up with unique ways to visualize and present a story. Not long after Hewitt took over as the main director of the newscast, *TV Guide* observed a day in the CBS-TV newsroom and made clear who was in charge of the operation:

> Don Hewitt, peppery director of the program and a former newspaperman, charges the atmosphere with going-to-press excitement. "Cut that speech," he shouts through the cutter's cubbyhole. "I need four minutes for the live interview," declares (Douglas) Edwards. "Can't have it," argues Hewitt. "Only three and a half. Knock off the extras on the Truman speech, cut the crowd on that London riot, hold the police report on the narcotic footage. That'll give you fifty-five seconds. Okay, Vinnie, run it through again."[343]

For more than four years, the small CBS-TV crew had been struggling with creating a new format for journalism, experimenting on the most effective ways of visualizing the news. When Hewitt took control, the ideas became wilder and more extreme. He realized the medium hadn't settled on a standard template for presenting the news, so he could let his imagination run to far off places. Larry Racies said Hewitt consistently thought of unique ways of covering or presenting stories. "He was always thinking about angles, and a lot of the people weren't, they were just trying to get a job done. And that I think was the difference."

Hewitt took on the characteristics of his two favorite fictional characters; Broadway Producer Julian Marsh in *42nd Street* and Hildy Johnson from *The Front Page*.

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[343]"Behind the TV News," *TV Guide,* 9-15 April 1949, 12.

He lived on the drama of finding the flashiest, fastest way to tell the story and beat the competition. His excesses are as celebrated as his innovations.

One of the first problems he tried to tackle was newscaster eye contact with the viewer. Since the commentator had to read the news from the script in his hand, the viewer watched the top of his head as much as his face. Hewitt went to Douglas Edwards and told him to learn Braille. "So all you had to do was sit there and have his fingers look over the script and he could look into the camera," said Hewitt. "They thought it was silly, but it's a hell of an idea." Fortunately, the TelePrompTer soon came along which kept Edwards from mastering a new way to read.

During the Korean War, Hewitt struggled with the same visualization problems as had the television news crew during World War II. While the newsreels were more abundant and a little faster by the early 1950s, each night Edwards had to present the latest war news without film. Hewitt expanded on an idea from CBS's World War II coverage. He went down to a children's store and bought toy soldiers and had the crew build a topographic map of Korea out of clay. The toy soldiers were repositioned each night to explain the latest fighting.

When the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, CBS had to explain the orbit around the earth. Hewitt had the crew put a globe on a turntable to simulate the rotation. Then he "went to a sports store in the neighborhood and bought a cotton golf ball and stuck it on the end of a black coat hanger opened up. I said, 'just keep the thing going around the globe.'" The golf ball became Sputnik and Edwards could chart its path as it passed over different parts of the world.

One of Hewitt's crazier ideas solved an important problem in early live coverage, and became the standard in television news. Before electronic graphics were invented, the simple notion of identifying the person on television caused headaches. To put a

person's name on the screen, a graphic artist would have to create the name and title before the broadcast so it could be super imposed over the live picture of the guest. During a live broadcast with unexpected speakers and live interview guests, the crew couldn't create all the names in advance. Instead, when the camera focused on a person at the podium or in the crowd, the director would have to quickly turn down the audio of the speaker and turn up the microphone of the commentator. The announcer would identify the person, and then the speaker's voice would return. Hewitt found this process clumsy and confusing.

During the 1952 conventions in Chicago, he was sitting in a diner waiting to order when he looked up at the menu board with the individual white letters pushed into the black background to spell out HAMBURGER $1.00 or SOUP $.25. Instead of breakfast, Hewitt bought the menu board. "I bought it for $35 with all the letters and went back to the studio and set it up and said, 'look, instead of writing H-A-M-B-U…, you write ROCKEFELLER with white on black. You can superimpose it over the picture and you don't have to dip the audio." Hewitt's menu board eventually evolved into the electronic character generator and later into computer graphics, but his idea is still how people are most often identified in television news to this day.[344]

Often, Hewitt's wild ideas centered on ways to beat the other TV networks or newsreel companies on big stories. When a plane crashed in the East River in New York one night, the film crews couldn't get to the crash site because of a tugboat strike in New York. The only tug on the river happened to be from New Haven, which was out of the union jurisdiction. All of the reporters and film crews were huddled on the New Haven tug interviewing the captain, who had seen the wreckage. Plus, the captain was going to

[344]Racies, Hewitt, Burger, Hammerslough quotes from interviews (LR-OH2), (DH-OH2), (CB-OH2), (JH-OH2); diner menu board story also from Mickelson interview, (SM-OH); Hewitt plane flight quote and information from Sperber, 519.

take all the film crews to the crash site when the sun came up. During the interview, Hewitt interrupted the captain during an important part of his crash description to find out who owned the tugboat. The other reporters gave him furious looks for his inane question during such an important story.

Hewitt slipped out of the wheelhouse and got on the phone. He called the owner and paid to charter the tugboat. The captain immediately put Hewitt in charge and he had all the other news people kicked off the boat. Then the CBS crew motored out to the crash scene when the sun came up for exclusive pictures while the other news crews watched from the dock.

Persistence and luck brought Hewitt more fame in 1956 when the luxury liner *Andrea Doria* was hit by the *Stockholm* on its way to New York. CBS was way behind the other television crews in finding a way to fly over the damaged boat out in the Atlantic Ocean. Still, Hewitt and Edwards raced up to Rhode Island to meet a film crew and take a Coast Guard helicopter to the *Andrea Doria*. When the two men arrived at the Coast Guard station, the other news crews were already leaving with their precious film to make it back to New York in time for the nightly newscasts. Hewitt, Edwards, and the CBS film crew decided to get their pictures anyway, even though they had been beaten on the story.

As Edwards narrated the scene standing in the doorway of the helicopter with the damaged boat below him, Hewitt asked the Coast Guard pilot when the boat might sink. The pilot told the photographer not to turn off his camera. "And sure enough with our cameras grinding away, and Doug looking down and describing it, the *Andrea Doria* rolled over like a big dead elephant and as the water emptied out of its swimming pools, she sank. I couldn't quite believe I had seen what I had seen. One minute she was there

and the next she was gone." That footage became one of the biggest exclusives in television news that year and won awards for the CBS crew.

All of these incidents, and dozens more, helped build the Hewitt reputation and have provided him great stories to tell and re-tell over the years. But the wild stunts and brash behavior also stemmed from his belief in and enthusiasm for television news. The CBS-TV news crew had long suffered in the shadow of Murrow and the CBS radio news reputation. Hewitt brought an infusion of confidence. "Don Hewitt was always the questioner," said Chet Burger. "He never accepted the surface of things, he questioned authority and we did that relatively little in the early days of television. We just weren't important enough or powerful enough to be raising those questions." John Hammerslough, who worked on the assignment desk for a few years in the mid-1950s, said Hewitt's importance went beyond his understanding of how to visualize a story. He wouldn't back down when defending his people or his newscast. "Don would stick up for his people as much as he could," remembered Hammerslough. "He took on management."

Hewitt also stood his ground with the radio news royalty. He considers Murrow and the World War II CBS correspondents to be the best group of journalists in any medium in that era. At the same time, Hewitt defended his work on television. Plus, he was able to take part in the big Murrow television events, as director of *See It Now* and the year-in-review correspondent roundtable discussions.

On one long plane flight sitting next to Murrow, Hewitt finally took a tiny jab at the hypocrisy of the radio legend's dismissive view of CBS television news. At the same time Murrow was lauded for his ground-breaking *See It Now* public affairs program, he also hosted an entertainment interview show on television, *Person to Person,* in the 1950s. That program had the bigger audience and provided Murrow with extra money,

while *See It Now* helped continue his hard news reputation. On *Person to Person,* Murrow could be seen interviewing guests as varied as Fred Astaire, Duke Ellington, Jane Fonda, Orson Welles, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale and Fidel Castro.

Hewitt was flying from Paris to New York after producing coverage of Grace Kelly's wedding. After a few martinis, Murrow mounted his high horse and asked Hewitt what the hell he was doing wasting his time on something as trivial as a celebrity wedding. "The same thing you were doing looking in Marilyn Monroe's closet on *Person to Person,"* shot back Hewitt. Murrow had no answer to that comparison.

One of Hewitt's most important innovations for television news involves one of the most basic elements of newscasts to this day. Today, a standard method of presenting a story is the reporter package. The reporter narrates the piece and intersperses interview clips and natural sound as well as the pictures to illustrate the story. These stories are generally edited before the newscast so they run as a finished product during the live newscast. But in Hewitt's early days, the technology made this idea seem out of reach. Instead, the news film normally was separated into sound and silent. A correspondent would read or ad lib the script in front of the film camera, much like a live shot today. The editors could also splice in interview clips as well. But those sound stories wouldn't include any of the pictures needed to illustrate the story. On the other hand, silent stories had the necessary pictures, but wouldn't include any interviews or reporter narration.

Hewitt decided to merge the sound and silent films to create a hybrid. These stories would include two separate films, one with interviews and the reporter on camera and the other with the illustrative pictures. In this complicated process, two film projectors would have to be started at the exact time live during the newscast. Hewitt could then switch back and forth between the "A" sound projector and the "B" silent projector. "So you could cut between the guy on camera and illustrating what he's

saying. Nobody had even thought of that before. I get big credit for thinking of that. I don't deserve any credit for that, any stupid kid would have come up with it, why they didn't, I don't know." Hewitt's idea became the standard practice in television news. Even though the stories are pre-produced these days and aren't switched live on the air, the interviews and reporter narrations are still known as "a-roll" and the pictures are "b-roll," although most television news people today probably don't know the origins of the terms.

Hewitt is both dismissive and proud of his work and television news during his early years. He is fond of saying that early television news was for children while the adults were still working on radio. Hewitt also doesn't give credit to the work of the people who came before him in television news and rejects the idea that the newscasts during his early years had an impact. "We were trying to invent a way to stamp journalism on TV as indelibly as it had been stamped on radio" insists Hewitt. "We weren't getting anywhere really." But when discussing his role and impact in those same years, Hewitt assumes a more positive tone. "It is one of those dream lives, everything fell into place. And why I knew to do this, do that…, I guess it came from a serious side of me that wanted to be a journalist and a less than serious side of me that wanted to be in show biz. And the two things married and one never took over from the other. There was kind of wedding of the two sides of me and I made it. Look, nobody's more surprised about it than I am."

Don Hewitt today is best known for creating *60 Minutes,* and turning it into the most successful and profitable news program in television history. But his innovations,

contributions and leadership at CBS-TV News during late 1940s and 1950s is just as important in the early development of television news.[345]

[345]Racies, Hewitt, Burger, Hammerslough quotes from interviews (LR-OH2), (DH-OH2), (CB-OH2), (JH-OH2); Hewitt quote on *Andrea Doria* sinking from Hewitt, *Tell Me a Story,* 59; other *Andrea Doria* information from Bliss, 228; other Hewitt information from Hewitt, *Tell Me A Story* 43-63.

Chapter 8

Peeking Over Their Shoulders:

More Viewers, Competition and Oversight

LOST AUTONOMY

The post-convention period at CBS-TV news didn't just mean a permanent newscaster in Edwards and a bigger role for Hewitt, but also the continuing erosion of the autonomy the early television news crew had enjoyed during the days of fewer newscasts and viewers.

A major change in leadership occurred during the excitement of the conventions. Edmund Chester became the new Director of News, Special Events, and Sports for CBS-TV, inserted above Bob Bendick in the television hierarchy. Bendick continued to plan and execute special events coverage such as elections and political conventions. Chester had previously run CBS's shortwave broadcasting operations for Central and South America. He had also worked as AP bureau chief in Chile.

During 1948, Oldsmobile joined Gulf as a sponsor of CBS-TV News. According to Cassirer, Chester made a rare appearance at a morning news meeting. He told the news people they needed to remember that General Motors not only made automobiles, but also produced vehicles and other equipment for the military. Therefore, CBS television news should avoid any obvious or implied criticism of U.S. government policy. Cassirer couldn't believe he was hearing such comments from a CBS news executive. He

had started at the network under Paul White, who was revered for his devotion to the independence of the news department from other interests, especially advertisers. Although Cassirer never knew of a specific case when an advertiser tried to change or kill a story, he was deeply troubled by Chester's comments.

Cassirer also found himself on the defensive for his overall approach to television news. As news editor, he had stuck to his strong belief that television news didn't have to be just a headline service. Cassirer felt the medium could also provide depth and context to the news. He brought over the analysis piece made popular by Murrow and other correspondents on CBS radio, and adapted it for television.

So while most television news efforts provided just the basic facts of some of the top stories, Cassirer made room in his 15-minute newscast for at least one in-depth piece. These stories could run as long as four minutes, which is a considerable chunk of time in such a short newscast. Plus, he didn't avoid complicated topics or stories that couldn't be easily visualized. One night the topic might be the effect of the changing Southern economy on civil rights, the next could be a detailed look at Truman's plan for aid to Turkey and Greece and what those countries could mean to the balance of power in that part of the world. When the newscasts expanded to five nights a week, sometimes the crew would pick one overarching topic and break it into five different parts for each day of the week. These lengthy stories would be visualized through a complicated collection of maps, animated graphics, still photographs, file film, and any other methods available.

"I wasn't interested only in the sensational last minute events," said Cassirer. "Since we were in a period of fundamental change in geography and politics, it seemed to me important that the viewer got an idea of what was really going on, not what is the latest event, but what are the forces that are fighting or pushing each other, both politically and militarily." This approach eventually landed him in the office of Vice

President Larry Lowman. Lowman told Cassirer to bring down the intellectual tone of the newscasts and imagine a 14-year-old boy in Texas as the viewer. Supposedly, this Texas teenager represented the American adult in audience surveys. Cassirer had never been to Texas and had no clue how to write the news for that age group. "What could I do? I said yes, but didn't do it," said Cassirer. "He was the boss and I knew which way the wind was blowing and it wasn't me. But I wasn't going to argue. What's the use in arguing with the boss?" As news editor, Cassirer continued to favor the in-depth piece as part of the nightly newscast.

By the end of the summer of 1948, the CBS-TV news staff had grown, but could still could all fit in one office for staff meetings. Douglas Edwards had settled in as the main newscaster with John Shafer and Don Goddard also handling some news duties. News Editor Henry Cassirer had been joined by Chet Burger and David Zellmer as assistant news editors. The main newscast directors were still Fred Rickey and David Rich, with both Don Hewitt and Henry Hobhouse helping as associate directors. Ruth Ashton and Mary Stack worked as researchers and writers. In the film department, Dave Tollen and James Wilson worked as photographers while Vince Walters and Ray Hall edited the film.

A couple of long-time CBS television people had jumped to competitors during the year. Leonard Hole had worked his way up to associate director of all television operations at CBS. In May 1948, he moved to Du Mont's New York station, WABD, as general manager. Earlier in the year, one of the main innovators in early CBS television news also left for another New York video outlet. Rudy Bretz signed on with WPIX-TV as assistant editor for news. WPIX was owned by the *New York Daily News* and hit the air with an aggressive approach to local news coverage in June 1948.

Continued expansion of CBS Television also meant the start of a nomadic, fragmented existence for the television news staff. For the next several years, the crew was shuttled from building to building, and from studio to studio as the network struggled to keep up with growing space and personnel needs. After the conventions, with the Grand Central Terminal studios and offices under construction, the television news staff moved to 501 Madison Avenue, while boss Edmund Chester stayed at CBS Television headquarters at 51 East 42nd Street. By November 1948, the television personnel could be found in six different locations around midtown Manhattan.[346]

COMPETITION

By August 1948, 31 television stations had signed on the air across the country. In addition to the eastern seaboard network, viewers could now watch their own programs in St. Louis, Milwaukee, Detroit, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, Buffalo, Atlanta, Los Angeles, St. Paul, and Toledo. Plus, new stations were putting up test patterns almost every week. Since most of these early stations started before network programming, they had been forced to create their own television programs from scratch. They tried quiz shows, dramas, vaudeville, interview programs, puppet shows, cooking demonstrations and anything else that could be put together cheaply and fill some time. The stations that invested in a mobile unit filled many of their hours with live sporting events from the local stadium or armory. Boxing, wrestling, baseball, basketball, hockey,

[346]Chester information from "People," *Broadcasting,* 23 April 1945, 82 and photo caption, *Broadcasting,* 12 July 1948, 30; Chester-GM comment from Cassirer, *Seeds,* 180-181; Cassirer analysis quote from interview, (HC-OH); Cassirer Texas boy quote from Cassirer, *Seeds,* 178-9 and interview, (HC-OH); TV offices and news personnel from "CBS Television News Offices," CBS Press Release, 26 July 1948; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL), and "CBS Television Personnel Now Quartered at Six Different New York Addresses," CBS Press Release, 16 November 1948; CBS Television 1941-6/51; (CBS-RL 5). Hole to WABD from "Hole Named Manager of New York's WABD," *Broadcasting,* 3 May 1948, 42; Bretz to WPIX from "WPIX (TV) in New York Adds Four to Its Staff," *Broadcasting,* 23 February 1948, 40.

football and horse racing proved to be early favorites. Plus, almost all of those stations scheduled some kind of newscast.[347]

Television news may have started with the first stations in New York and Los Angeles, but the format developed differently depending on the city and the station ownership. Since many of these stations opened before cities were linked in a network, they didn't have a template to follow. Their attention to news reflected the ownership and the community. Very few stations committed heavy resources to a news department in the early years, mainly because the stations lost money for a period of years before advertising revenue caught up with operating costs. Just putting a television signal on the air cost so much money, the owners didn't dare spend too much more on people and other resources to prepare and present the programs.

Therefore, the television newscast could involve just one man sitting at a desk reading United Press news from around the world as well as local stories he could dig up through the phone or in-person interviews. If the owner also had a radio station or a newspaper in the community, the television news department would often share resources with the more established news sources. Another approach involved contracting with a national newsreel company. The station would receive a collection of stories each day, all edited together on one reel. The station could simply have an announcer read the accompanying scripts while the newsreel footage ran on the air.

More ambitious stations would cut up those newsreels into separate stories and present them as part of a more elaborate approach to news, closer to the CBS-TV New York model. Plus, a few prescient stations saw news as a potential calling card for the station, and invested heavily in reporters, writers and most importantly, a team of film

[347]Stations on the air from "Television Stations on the Air," *Broadcasting,* 2 August 1948, 28.

photographers and editors to collect and distill scenes of stories from around the community.

So CBS-TV news in New York may have been a pioneer in television news back in 1944 and 1945. But by 1948, other stations had followed and some had already created a unique niche in news programming.

NBC: Farming Out the News

For the CBS-TV news people in the 1940s, NBC was the competition. The other television news efforts didn't even register on their radar, even though a few of the stations had already started to out-spend and out-hustle the older stations in at least some areas of video news coverage. ABC made attempts at news in the early years, even hired away CBS's John Daly to head the operation, but the old NBC Blue network didn't have enough resources to mount a serious effort.

The NBC competition came straight over from radio and from the network leaders themselves. Sarnoff vs. Paley. The older, more powerful National Broadcasting Company pitted against the tough competitor, the Columbia Broadcasting System. Since CBS had first distinguished itself in the area of news coverage during the war, the competition naturally moved over to the video side. Plus, both WCBS and WNBT broadcast from Manhattan, so they could watch each other's video news efforts, even in the years before the networks.

When discussing NBC's television news efforts, the easiest path and most-repeated version begins with John Cameron Swayze and the *Camel News Caravan*. But that newscast wouldn't even premiere until 1949. The years before 1949 included many different attempts in a variety of formats. Unlike CBS, which had a clear progression even as far back as the 1941 efforts, NBC's television news legacy until 1949 is a confusing mix of programs that came and went fairly quickly.

Basically, NBC farmed out its video news product to the whim of advertisers and film buffs. Once again, as had been the network's reputation throughout the early years of television, NBC owned the best equipment, the best facilities, and had access to the greatest engineers and inventors at RCA, but the network seemed to flounder when faced with the question of what to put in front of the camera.

It's important when discussing all television news in this period to separate regular news programs from live, special event coverage. Since RCA invented the mobile unit, NBC had the most extensive experience at pre-planned, live events such as political conventions, election nights, and important conferences. While CBS attempted its first live televised convention coverage in 1948, NBC could boast of similar live broadcasts all the way back into the late 1930s. For both networks, the live, pre-planned events allowed the television side to share resources with the more experienced, seasoned radio newscasters. Since NBC had developed its own small network with Philadelphia and Schenectady throughout the 1940s, that network could more easily pull from different live locations during these special events.

But NBC didn't put the same kind of effort into its regularly-scheduled television news programs. Going back to 1940, the network contracted with Standard Oil to present the *The Esso Television Reporter*. The oil company had sponsored a successful radio news program, *The Esso Reporter,* for several years on many stations across the country. The television version involved an announcer reading news on camera with photographs to illustrate the stories and organ music to provide the right mood. *The Esso Television Reporter* spread to a group of video stations in the early years. Another version of this format, *Your Esso Reporter*, came back to NBC-TV in the summer of 1946 and disappeared a year later. WNBT also simulcast Lowell Thomas' radio newscast on television during the early years.

Newsreel Tradition

The clear lineage of NBC-TV news began in a very casual fashion. During the war, NBC obtained the rights to run Army Signal Corps films. Paul Alley, who had been working in newsreels, called John Royal at NBC and asked what the network was going to do with the films. "They didn't know, so I just walked in and created the job," said Alley. "We put on a news show called *The War as it Happens*. The show ran whenever we got the film. I wrote the copy, directed the editing, did the narration, and picked the background music." NBC announcer Ray Forrest also handled some of the narration in *The War as it Happens*, which lasted through the rest of the war. While this program barely resembled a regularly scheduled newscast, *The War as it Happens* is significant because the program's roots and creator came from theater newsreels. As Alley said, the network only presented the program when the films made it back to the United States. He made no attempt to present the latest war news. This reliance on the pictures came straight out of the newsreel tradition and would become a trademark of NBC news, for good and for bad, for many years.

By the fall of 1945, *The War as it Happens* had evolved into *NBC Tele-Newsreel*, a weekly newscast which looked like a theater newsreel. This effort had slightly different names over the years, including *NBC Television Newsreel* and *NBC Video Newsreel*. Alley eventually expanded the operation with film crews in Washington, Los Angeles, and Texas to supplement the films from the newsreel companies.

Once again, Alley was following the theater newsreel approach of either hiring photographers or contracting with stringers in various cities to supply the necessary film. This model started NBC in the direction of weaning itself away from the reliance on an outside newsreel company to provide its newsfilm. The downside of this model is that *NBC Tele-Newsreel* was separate from the NBC radio news operation. Big names like

H.V. Kaltenborn and Robert Trout (who had bolted CBS after Murrow bumped him out of his prized radio spot) appeared on NBC-TV during special events, but the weekly newsreels were left to Alley and his network of film sources.

In 1948, NBC viewers had even more choices for television news. But instead of bringing all the programs under a common name and purpose, the network instead developed into a schizophrenic collection of offerings, each with its own boss, format, mission, and crew.

In January 1948, NBC radio news took tentative steps towards a regularly scheduled newscast on television. *NBC Television Newsroom* featured Trout, W.W. Chaplin and John MacVane reading the latest news from the NBC radio newsroom. Early television critics and other viewers had long criticized such a simplistic format with no attention to visuals. Plus, NBC's radio newsroom wasn't built or modified to be photographed on TV so viewers complained about the dull office background. In the end, the commentators still had a primary allegiance to their radio broadcasts. So if a big story was breaking Thursday nights at 9:15 PM when *NBC Television Newsroom* hit the air, Trout, Chaplin, or MacVane might not be at the desk because they were busy handling the story for the massive radio network audience.

Winning the Cigarette Money

Any publicity *NBC Television Newsroom* might have generated quickly evaporated in February with the announcement of one of the biggest sponsorship packages in television history. R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company and its advertising agency, William Esty Company, had been working on putting together the best format for promoting Camel cigarettes on the small screen. Many predicted some kind of sports programming since Camel used sports stars to sell cigarettes in newspapers and magazines at the time. Instead, the advertiser chose news, specifically the newsreel

format. Plus, Camel chose NBC for the one-year contract. That network offered the best coverage for the advertiser, since NBC had already linked together stations in five eastern cities, months before AT&T opened up the commercial coaxial cable network. The deal also involved the newsreel resources of 20th Century Fox-Movietone News, to provide the film.

Since the television industry was still hemorrhaging money at this time, the NBC-Camel announcement generated serious attention because the advertiser was paying $10 thousand a week to produce the newsreel. "We think we are paying an awful lot," said Thomas Luckenbill of the William Esty agency, "while 20th Century-Fox doesn't think they're getting enough. All of us are getting experienced in television from this venture and I guess we will have to pay our share of the cost." NBC's Frank Mullen knew his network had scored a major victory by pulling in the Camel money. "We regard this contract as one of the most significant steps in television history and are proud that NBC will be associated with Camel cigarettes and 20th Century Fox in bringing television's first daily newsreel to the public." The "first daily newsreel" comment must have surprised stations such as WFIL in Philadelphia that already provided such a service, but Mullen's excitement is understandable with such an expensive sponsorship deal.[348]

Noticeably absent from any part of the operation is NBC News. The sizable monetary contract came at a high price, at least in journalistic circles. The advertiser supervised the broadcast, from determining production techniques to deciding on what stories to include. NBC announcers such as John Cameron Swayze might be responsible for some of the narration in the newsreel, but the network didn't control the content. To

[348]NBC news history from Karnick 26-34, Castleman and Podrazik 1-35, Alley quote from Kisseloff, 357; *NBC Television Newsroom* from "Bob Trout Will Do Video News Program for NBC," *Broadcasting,* 26 January 1948, 44, and Karnick, 27; Camel deal from "Newsreel: Camels Will Televise Daily on Network," *Broadcasting,* 2 February 1948, 17.

make the arrangement crystal clear, NBC took out a full page ad in *Broadcasting* magazine to celebrate the deal. The advertisement featured a movie storyboard with cute drawings representing the steps in the process under the heading "Here's how CAMEL telecasts the NEWS!"

> -Wm Esty Co. has events filmed by Twentieth Century Fox Movietone News…
> -Shots are edited, scored, narrated, then
> -Camel themes and commercials are integrated.
> -A new 10-minute reel is telecast each Monday through Friday….
> -Reels are flown to NBC television affiliates not yet joined to the Eastern Network while…
> -Viewers in New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Baltimore and Schenectady (Boston soon) watch simultaneous broadcast of latest events.
> -Result: more news, more viewers, more Camels.[349]

Under this arrangement, 20th Century Fox Movietone News handled the content decisions, just as it would for its theatre newsreels. President Spyros Skouras saw the Camel arrangement as an extension of its movie theater service. "The entire world-wide resources of Movietone News will be placed behind the newsreel, so that television audiences—first on the East Coast, later in the Midwest, and finally on the entire coast-to-coast NBC Television Network will see the finest, most up-to-the minute news of the world. These television versions will be produced in addition to the two regular motion picture theatre editions now being released by Movietone news."

Camel Newsreel Theatre premiered on February 16, 1948 as a ten-minute newsreel at 7:45 each evening. The deal created enough attention in industry circles that people tuned in to see what $10,000 a week could buy in television news coverage. The critics were underwhelmed. *Camel Newsreel Theatre* looked just like a theatre newsreel, but without the clarity and size of a motion picture projector on a big screen. Plus, the newsreel format on television certainly wasn't new. Several stations offered filmed

[349]"Camel's Choice…NBC Television," *Broadcasting,* 8 March 1948, 38A.

highlights of top local or national stories already without the clout of a national advertiser.

Comparing Different Newscasts

During the first week of *Camel Newsreel Theatre*, Jerry Franken of *Billboard* magazine sat down to watch one night of the new offering. He appreciated the timeliness of the lead story on the Greek civil war, but said the rest of the newsreel "lacked any quality of news, urgency or immediacy." He told theatre owners they had nothing to fear from the new competition. *Camel Newsreel Theatre* offered the same confusing mix of stories of dubious news value linked only by the fact that they all had been filmed. Franken called it "filler-diller, pure and simple. Item—Soviet grain arriving in England. Item—a new type of potato mash for cattle feed. Item—ice fishing. Item—a Tyrolean folk festival with lots of bare-legged guys shooting off old fowling pieces. Item—a fashion clip. Item—world championship ping-pong matches." Franken wondered about the absence of all the big stories in the news that day and why they had no place in the newsreel, and even criticized the photography, saying the film didn't include enough close-ups for the small screen.

For comparison, Franken then switched over to Channel 2 and the *CBS Television News* which began at 8:00 PM. In February 1948, CBS had not yet expanded to nightly newscasts and was still broadcasting only to New York City viewers. Fred Rickey directed that night's newscast with Douglas Edwards in front of the camera reading scripts written by Henry Cassirer, Chet Burger and Edwards. By contrast with the new NBC-Camel offering, CBS still had limited access to newsreel film and instead relied on the combination of different visual elements within the newscast. Franken called the CBS newscast a "well-edited newsy offering. Its technique is all-embracing, using shots of the announcer, Doug Edwards, stills, film clips and still and map montages."

Franken lamented the dated film from international stories, just had he had with the NBC newsreel. But he singled out an example of Cassirer's lengthy analysis piece for praise: "…a summary of the Chinese situation, pegged on the President's speech asking for aid, was well-rounded. It contrasted Governor Dewey's appeal three months ago with Truman's address, showing each via a still (photograph) montaged on a map, and underscoring the situation through newsreel clips of the warfare, starvation and governmental mismanagement which characterize China today." The CBS effort might not have generated the publicity of the *Camel Newsreel Theatre*, but at least one critic appreciated the years of trial and error of developing a distinct format for television news, even on a limited budget.[350]

NBC Continues Separate Newsreel Operation

Another television news offering overshadowed by the Camel operation was on the same channel and network. Even with the addition of *Camel Newsreel Theatre* and *NBC Television Newsroom* in early 1948, the network still also ran *NBC Television Newsreel*, the Paul Alley-produced program. In fact, the NBC newsreel had expanded to four nights a week by April 1948.

Even though Alley was an NBC employee, the network chose once again to give away control of a television news program. NBC turned over *NBC Television Newsreel* to Jerry Fairbanks Productions in a five-year deal. Alley still put together the newsreels, but now he reported to an outside production company, not NBC. Washington photographer Jesse Sabin moved to New York as newsreel editor while former Universal Newsreel photographer Joseph Vadala took over in Washington. The ten-minute newsreels ran Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Sundays at 10:00 PM.

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[350]Skouras quote from "Newsreel," *Broadcasting,* 2 February 1948, 17; "Camel Newsreel Theatre" review from Jerry Franken, "Camel Newsreel Theatre," *Billboard,* 18 February 1948, 18; CBS review from Jerry Franken, "CBS Television News," *Billboard,* 18 February 1948, 14.

The network also flew copies of the *NBC Television Newsreel* to affiliates not yet connected to the New York operation. WWJ-TV in Detroit received one newsreel a week and ran it twice. In a survey of more than 400 of the 6,000 television set owners in Detroit at the start of 1948, viewers ranked *NBC Television Newsreel* as the best program on the station.

While *Camel Newsreel Theatre* received most of the attention, the network of staff photographers and freelance cameramen around the country that Alley was putting together for the "other" NBC newsreel would be key to NBC landing the next big sponsorship deal for television news within the year.

NBC also contracted out news coverage for the political conventions that summer. *Life* magazine's sponsorship of the political events didn't only mean the magazine's reporters could appear on TV alongside NBC radio newscasters in Philadelphia, but also that publisher Andrew Heiskell had final say on coverage issues. The NBC-*Life* combination also continued on election night that year.

By the fall of 1948, those people responsible for news on NBC began to rethink their efforts. *NBC Television Newsroom* faded away during the year, but the network did bring over a popular interview program from radio, *Meet the Press*. The editor of *American Mercury* magazine, Lawrence Spivak, started the show along with Martha Rountree. The original mission of *Meet the Press* had been to promote the magazine.

The network also began to reconfigure its management structure to provide for leadership when NBC started to assert some control over the news product. The network's vice president for news and international relations, William F. Brooks, put Francis McCall in charge of all news and special events. At the same time, Adolph Schneider became director of television news and special events.

The people putting up the money for the *Camel Newsreel Theatre* began to have doubts about the arrangement. First of all, NBC didn't schedule any programs before the 7:45 PM newsreel. So people watching television before that time would be tuned to other channels. NBC later addressed that concern by providing programming earlier in the evening. The advertising agency also wasn't happy with the film quality from 20th Century Fox. NBC got wind of the various complaints and started to lobby the advertiser to dump the newsreel company and allow the network to produce the news program itself. [351]

Camel News Caravan

At the start of 1949, Camel dropped 20th Century Fox and handed the production of the news program over to NBC. The network altered the traditional newsreel format and fashioned a broadcast that would include a regular commentator appearing on camera, much like Douglas Edwards over at CBS. The advertiser chose the name of and the face for its new journalistic effort. For many years, the cigarette company had sponsored a musical program on radio called the *Camel Caravan*. Insert the mission of the broadcast and NBC's newest journalistic effort on television became known as the *Camel News Caravan*. As Reuven Frank said years later, apparently no one thought to ask what a "news caravan" might be.

As sponsor, Camel got to pick the person who would front the newscast. After the sponsor and advertising agency auditioned several candidates, they picked John

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[351] *NBC Television Newsreel* from "NBC TV Newsreel Adds Wednesday Night Period," *Broadcasting,* 5 April 1948, 81, "Fairbanks Is Taking Over NBC Television Newsreel," *Broadcasting,* 12 April 1948, 93, Karnick 27; WWJ survey from "WWJ-TV Survey," *Broadcasting,* 22 March 1948, 22; Meet the Press from Rick Ball and NBC News, *Meet the Press: Fifty Years of History in the Making* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1998), 3-19, and Bliss, 374. Management change from "NBC Realigns Its News Department in New York," *Broadcasting,* 9 August 1948, 58; problems with Camel Newsreel from Karnick, 27.

Cameron Swayze and paid him $110 thousand a year to read the news on the *Camel News Caravan*.

John Cameron Swayze

Just like Edwards, Swayze has been portrayed as a news lightweight and a performer, from contemporaries at both NBC and CBS. Still, Swayze had close to 20 years of experience before taking over the television newscast. He grew up in Wichita Kansas and headed to New York at the end of the 1920s to study acting. But when the depression hit, he headed back home and lined up a reporter's job at the *Kansas City Journal Post*. While reporting for the newspaper, Swayze also doubled as a news commentator on KMBC radio. For a short time, he even took part in a very early television experiment. In 1933, Swayze climbed to the top of Kansas City's tallest building at noon and read the news into an old mechanical television camera. People would gather around a crude television set in the lobby of the building and watch Swayze deliver the headlines.

In 1944, he moved to Los Angeles as the director of news and special events for NBC's western division. Three years later, he joined NBC on the east coast as a New York newscaster for network radio.

Sponsor Money Builds NBC-TV News

In February 1949, NBC replaced the ten-minute *Camel Newsreel Theatre* with the 15-minute *Camel News Caravan*, both at 7:45 PM. Swayze inherited quite a sizable audience. Even though the sponsors might have had problems with the format, *Camel Newsreel Theatre* was popular with the viewers. In its last month on the air, the NBC newsreel finished eighth in the ratings in New York for daily broadcasts, behind popular kids programs such as *Small Fry Club*, *Howdy Doody*, and *Lucky Pup*. The program

finished first in daily news programs, ahead of WABD's *Camera Headlines. CBS Television News* didn't finish in the top eleven of daily programs. Over in Philadelphia during the same month, *Camel Newsreel Theatre* finished in third place for daily programs, just ahead of CBS-TV News and WFIL's *TV Newsreel*.

Camel chose to stay with NBC for its next news incarnation because of familiarity and the wider network of stations. But the advertiser also wanted to tap into the resources of the *NBC Television Newsreel* network and staff. Since the 20th Century Fox Movietone operation had been jettisoned, the newsfilm had to come from somewhere. The NBC newsreel operation had continued to expand during 1948 and had enough resources to take over the film needs of the *Camel News Caravan*. Plus, the network had little choice than to fold in the network newsreel staff into the Camel broadcast. Under the new contract, NBC could no longer offer any other news programs between 6:00 PM and 11:00 PM during the week. The advertiser adhered so closely to that stipulation that NBC couldn't broadcast special reports for a time during the Korean War.

The advertising agency might not have liked the newsreel format, but wanted as much film from as many places as possible in the new broadcast. By one account, by the time *Camel News Caravan* launched in February 1949, the newsreel portion of the news department included 38 cameras, 18 mobile units, 16 reporters and correspondents within a full staff of 56. This list undoubtedly included people and equipment at NBC network affiliates, yet the numbers are still impressive for that early era in television news.

Reuven Frank, who started at NBC News a year after the launch of *Camel News Caravan*, said the advertising money allowed NBC to build a television news department. "The money from Camel cigarettes supported the entire national and worldwide structure of NBC Television News—salaries, equipment, bureau rents, and overseas allowances to educate reporters' children, with enough left over to allow for some other programs, local

news, talk, a weekly program aimed awkwardly and self-consciously at high school students, a sports newsreel Friday night in summer when Gillette razors did not sponsor boxing. Even when there were other paying advertisers, Camel paid for the infrastructure that made their programs possible."[352]

First on Scene, First on Screen

NBC and CBS obviously weren't the only television station owners experimenting with television news formats. The importance of the quantity, quality, and timeliness of news film became paramount to a few of the most aggressive, news-oriented television stations.

In September 1947, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* started its own commercial television station, WFIL. WFIL invested in a crew of film photographers and editors to capture the most important pictures in the city each day and compile them into a timely daily newsreel. Just six months later, the National Headliners Club for the first time honored a television station for news coverage. WFIL-TV won the Headliners Club award for its "general excellence in the daily presentation of an up-to-the-minute televised newsreel of events taking place the same day as shown."

Just as NBC and CBS television crews had prided themselves on shooting and airing film on the same day a few years earlier, more and more stations now got caught up in the speed of gathering and presenting film of visual stories in their own community. WMAR-TV in Baltimore was so proud of its coverage of a factory fire, the station and its agency took out a full page ad in a trade magazine to boast of the accomplishment. WMAR photographer Alex Malashuk got a "fine view" of the tower of smoke and flame. Newsmen Edward Nolan and Joseph DiPaola "were within singe-ing distance of the

[352]Camel News Caravan and Swayze information from Frank, 32-34, Karnick, 27-28, Matusow, 57-60, "News," *Broadcasting,* 2 June 1947, 65; January 1949 ratings from "Video Pulse," *Broadcasting,* 7 February 1949, 80; Frank quote from Frank, *Out of Thin Air,* 33.

burning factory itself." But most importantly, the film and editing crews worked so quickly that they "had the pictures on Baltimore television screens while firemen were still pouring water on the smoking embers."

In New York, the push for speed and pictures hit a new peak with the addition of WPIX-TV in 1948. The video side of the *New York Daily News* picked local news as its niche even before signing on the air in June. With the opening of the coaxial cable in May, WPIX executives watched as NBC and CBS concentrated on national and international stories in their newscasts which were now seen in several cities. WNBT and WCBS didn't immediately offer a separate newscast just for the New York viewers. So WPIX set out to become New York's local news station. Pictures would be a key to that strategy, hence the call letters—WPIX.

In a full-page advertisement in *Broadcasting* magazine less than a month before signing on the air, WPIX promised to be "First on scene, first on screen!" The station spent a half-million dollars on news the first year alone, more than many stations spent on their entire operation. The WPIX news gathering arsenal included ten photographers in New York and Washington, a Grumman Amphibian aircraft complete with a darkroom, a single-engine Waco airplane for aerial photography and quick access to distant stories, a station wagon with a roof deck specially designed for a heavy camera and two cameramen, and high speed film processors.

The station offered two newscasts, at 7:30 PM and 11:00 PM. each night. The second newscast was scheduled on purpose after most of the other stations had signed off. WPIX hoped people would turn off their sets tuned to Channel 11, so the station would get the first crack at those viewers the next day.

During the first week of the WPIX *Telepix Newsreel*, a DC-6 passenger plane crashed in Pennsylvania, en route to New York. WPIX flew its own news plane to the

scene of the crash. To make sure the viewers knew that WPIX would have pictures back and on the air later in the evening, the staff announcer repeated a phrase during the evening which has burned itself into television news history, "film at eleven."

In August, WPIX made national news with its coverage of a Russian school teacher's jump from a third-floor window at the Russian consulate in New York. *Newsweek* called the coverage "the biggest scoop on national news yet scored by video." The magazine was most impressed because the woman jumped around 4:15 PM and WPIX was able to shoot, develop, and run the film during its 7:30 PM *Telepix Newsreel*, a full day ahead of the other stations. The WPIX film included shots of the woman lying in the courtyard alone, followed by Russians bundling her into an ambulance to be taken to the hospital. The staff later boasted it had scooped even its parent newspaper, by airing the film a half-hour before the next edition of the *New York Daily News* hit the streets.[353]

CBS TURNS TO NEWSREEL COMPANY FOR PICTURES

In the spring of 1948, as CBS-TV news grew from one station into a network of viewers along the eastern part of the country, the network made a decision which would define the look and visual direction of the newscasts for many years. As stations like WFIL in Philadelphia built their reputation on timely film for their newscasts, and the *New York Daily News* was ready to launch its television outlet with call letters to hammer home the importance of the pictures (WPIX), CBS chose to turn over the responsibility of most of its news film to an outside company. Instead of building its own network of film

[353]Headliners award from "Headliners Award to TV News Show," *Broadcasting,* 22 March 1948, 92; WMAR fire coverage from "Baltimore gets news fast on WMAR-TV," *Broadcasting,* 26 July 1948, 19; WPIX film focus from advertisement, *Broadcasting,* 24 May 1948, 39, Allen, *News is People,* 3-7, Russian teacher from "Video was There," *Newsweek,* 23 August 1948, 48, and "WPIX Gets the Jump," *Broadcasting,* 16 August 1948, 94.

crews, in May 1948, CBS contracted with *Telenews*, a newsreel company, to provide the network with the majority of its pictures.

More than a half century later, the idea of one of the country's top broadcast news corporations allowing an outside company to determine the film content of its visual newscast sounds misguided, if not irresponsible. But given the accepted practices of the time, the out-sourcing of news film appeared to be a legitimate solution to a massive predicament as the local newscast overnight became a network news operation.

Limited Staff for Shooting Film

The CBS-TV news crew had learned not to rely on film to visualize most of its stories. In the early days, getting pictures of a story still in the news was a rarity. During the war, the news crew would be writing about the current battles while the military film arriving in this country represented stories from days or weeks before. Cassirer and the others learned to save much of the film they received and build a library for future use. So if they happened to receive film of farming in Peru, that footage could be saved and catalogued for use in any future stories concerning South American agriculture.

In one of his articles on effective visualization, Cassirer emphasizes the importance of stock film in an era when editors couldn't rely on timely pictures of the current news. "Stock shots of Nazi atrocities, German militarism and European reconstruction are out of date in themselves. But they became current news when used to show the charges against the defendants in the Nuremburg trials and televised on the eve of the sentence." The lack of timely news film is one reason why the CBS-TV crew developed such elaborate methods for visualizing the news, including the maps, animated graphics, drawings, and still pictures.

As the war ended and some film cameras became available at the television station, the crew started to turn to more New York stories utilizing news film. In that era,

Larry Racies would go out on stories either alone, or maybe with visualizer Chet Burger to take notes and write the script to go with the edited film. Most of the time, the film was silent. Recording sound on a film shoot was a much more complicated process and involved a bigger, and much heavier, sound camera.

But since the crew had learned how to visualize stories through so many different methods, the one or two photographers available to shoot timely film in the New York City area might have been enough for the small staff to incorporate into a 15-minute newscast, which often included a long analysis piece to take up some of those precious minutes. As late as September 1949, the CBS-TV network news relied on just two photographers and three cameras, two silent and one sound, to shoot "much of the news film" which appeared on the nightly newscast. During that period, photographers Dave Tollen and Vince Walters handled the New York assignments for the news department. Tollen and Walters were responsible for big stories such as the Holland Tunnel explosion, United Nations sessions, and dignitaries arriving on the ocean liners. But they were also sent out on fashion shows, man-on-the-street interviews, as well as assignments for CBS entertainment programs. Plus, CBS-TV news still didn't have any reporters dedicated to the video newscast. Chet Burger, and later Douglas Edwards, would go out on stories in the area, but they both had pressing duties back in the newsroom as well.

Preparing for True Network News

Maybe the small television crew turned out to be a victim of its own resourcefulness. Using just a couple of photographers and cameras, the CBS-TV newscast had received a much more favorable review from the *Billboard* media critic in February 1948 than the highly-publicized, expensive *Camel Newsreel Theatre*, which included the full resources of the 20th Century Fox newsreel network at its disposal.

Two photographers and three cameras might have been sufficient for a few daily stories out of New York, but would be little help covering stories in other parts of the country or the world, when CBS-TV news finally became a true network newscast in May 1948. Plus, at the same time, the television news operation expanded from just a few days a week into a five-day-a-week operation. If the network wanted to present a national and world view on television, the news department would need access to news film from many parts of the globe.

As CBS got ready to send its newscast along the coaxial cable, a few different approaches had already been implemented by other stations to increase the amount and quality of newsfilm. If CBS wanted to follow the newsreel model, it could set up film bureaus across the country and around the world. CBS radio news had continued its extensive system of international bureaus, even after World War II. The television photographers could have worked out of the same bureaus as the radio correspondents, as would become the case during the middle 1950s. The network might have been able to set up film photographers at key radio station affiliates around this country as well. This would have been undoubtedly an expensive undertaking, at a time when television was still losing money.

WFIL in Philadelphia, WPIX in New York, WBAP in Fort Worth, and a few others stations made a massive investment in photographers, editors, equipment and vehicles necessary to blanket a community and present an impressive amount of timely news film on their newscasts. But this model would only help WCBS with its New York audience. Since the company planned to present a newscast for a much wider geographic audience, winning the battle of news film in New York alone wouldn't help on all the non-New York news.

NBC was following two separate visual paths at the same time in 1948. To get the cigarette money, NBC gave up all editorial control of the newsreel to 20th Century Fox Movietone News for the *Camel Newsreel Theatre*. (*Camel News Caravan* would not replace the newsreel until 1949.) The newsreel company not only shot and edited the newsfilm, but chose the stories that would be covered and presented. But at the same time, Paul Alley had started to create a small network of staff photographers and freelancers around the country to help provide newsfilm for the concurrent *NBC Television Newsreel.*

Telenews

In the end, CBS chose to take a less-expensive, middle road. The television news department would continue to operate as it had in the past, making all the editorial and visualization decisions. But now CBS would add in the services of *Telenews* to provide film from around the country and the world. In this context, newsfilm became another journalistic resource to be gathered by an outside organization and presented to the CBS newsroom, much like Associated Press or United Press. In fact, when *Telenews* announced plans for a daily newsreel feed for television stations, the service was bundled with International News Service and International News Photos TV stations could buy one package and get their wire service stories, their still photographs, and their newsfilm all at one price. [354]

Telenews started with one theater in San Francisco in 1939. Alfred Burger and Herbert Scheftel thought people would want to watch the latest newsreels without sandwiching them in between the entertainment movies. The *Telenews* theatre featured

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[354]Cassirer quote from Cassirer, "The Camera Eye;" Tollen and Walters information from "Dave Tollen and Vincent Walters," CBS Press Release, 16 September 1949; CBS News 1949 Press Releases; (CBS-RL); *Telenews* service from "INS-INP, *Telenews* Plan News Service," *Broadcasting,* 5 January 1948, 19.

the best material from the various newsreel companies, edited together in one package. The idea worked so well, *Telenews* opened 13 more theaters around the country. Eventually, the company set up its own newsreel production service so it wouldn't have to rely on other companies for material.

In early 1948, *Telenews* took a gamble that television stations might someday supplant movie theaters as the main client for newsreel film. The company made the decision to use the cheaper, smaller 16 millimeter (mm) format cameras. Theater newsreel photographers had always used the massive 35mm cameras, the same as used for Hollywood movies. The large size of the movie theater screen demanded the quality provided by the 35mm format. But the 35mm cameras, especially those outfitted for sound, were heavy and hard to maneuver. Therefore, newsreel photographers tended to set up in one spot and shoot all their film while rarely moving the camera. This practice worked fine for the pre-packaged, staged newsreel stories and podium interviews, but proved to be too confining for news stories.

On the other hand, 16mm silent cameras were light and easy to carry. While 35mm offered a much higher quality picture, on the early television screens the difference in clarity wasn't as easy to distinguish. Television stations, such as WCBS, quickly adopted 16mm for most of their film.

Herbert Scheftel ran the television newsreel for *Telenews* and when the service was announced, he predicted the company would provide the best pictures possible for the small screen. "This undertaking has been carefully planned and projected not merely for the present status of television but also to anticipate the future growth and requirements of the television public, the networks, individual stations, and advertisers."

The first *Telenews* daily newsreel shipped to clients in March 1948. Two months later, CBS signed a contract to receive the *Telenews* service. Under the agreement, CBS

would not only receive the five-minute daily newsreel, but eight minutes of additional un-edited newsfilm Monday through Friday. The *Telenews* service became a popular source of news film for stations. During the 1950s, the company had contracts with many of the stations around the country to receive the daily newsreel.

Bob Bendick said the crew didn't look at the *Telenews* deal as a sign the network wasn't committed to building a strong television news department. The idea of building a network of film photographers in 1948 seemed to be a daunting and expensive project. "I think the economics were important," said Bendick. "To establish such a thing was pretty difficult and you weren't that sure at that time that it would be that much better than the *Telenews* coverage of it."

In reality, CBS didn't completely turn over newsfilm responsibilities to the whim of an outside company. First of all, the network still used its own photographers in the New York area on big stories. Plus, since CBS proved to be *Telenews*' biggest client, the arrangement evolved into more of a working partnership. *Telenews* had an assignment editor in Washington to handle political stories and other events in the vicinity of the nation's capital. An assignment editor in New York handled news coverage for the rest of the country. In 1951, Howard Back became the *Telenews* assignment editor in New York. Even by the age of 24, Back already had a graduate degree from Ohio State as well as experience in radio and television news in the Midwest.

Back said that he would be in constant contact with CBS on potential stories to cover. During this period, Chet Burger ran the assignment desk for CBS, so he and Back would talk several times during the day. "It was as simple as the first phone call early in the morning between our desk and their desk," remembered Back, "saying 'hey what's going on today?" and my reply would be 'I'm already doing this, which we had planned the night before, and I'm looking at this and this, and they would come back, back and

forth, 'Hey we got word that this… or we know this is going on, let's get a crew down and cover that." *Telenews* often relied on CBS for information on breaking news since the network had access to more wire services and sources than the smaller newsreel company. Burger said he and Back worked hand in glove. "He and I got along marvelously. He and I would be on the phone, he would tell me what he was covering, I would suggest things, sometimes there'd be things he'd want to cover and didn't have a crew and we would assign it."

With CBS's status as the largest client of *Telenews,* the network didn't have to wait for the edited syndicated newsreel each day. Instead, *Telenews* would often develop a copy of the unedited film and deliver it to CBS as soon as it was available. Therefore, the network could edit its own story from the available footage. Since the assignment editors for both CBS and *Telenews* worked so closely together, CBS always had top priority over the other newsreel clients. Plus, other *Telenews* station weren't allowed to use much of the film until after the CBS network newscast each night.

Telenews consisted of three to six crews in the New York area, a few more in Washington, and one full-time crew in Chicago. Later, the company added full time photographers in Dallas and Los Angeles. *Telenews* had also created a network of freelance photographers to handle all the stories in between. Plus, the company had agreements with several foreign newsreel companies. Often, *Telenews* would include stories from foreign countries to the daily syndicated newsreel to help add to the necessary feet of film required per day in the station contracts.

CBS CREATES NETWORK OF FILM PHOTOGRAPHERS

Over the years, the network made moves to bolster the amount and variety of film available for the television newscast. One particularly half-hearted attempt created more ill-will between radio and television news people. In late 1949, instead of hiring film crews for the CBS foreign bureaus, CBS sent 16 Bell and Howell silent cameras to its correspondents around the world. The package included brief instructions on how to use the cameras with the hope that the radio journalists would begin shooting their own film on news stories. London bureau chief Howard K. Smith didn't mince any words on the topic in a letter to Murrow: "I frankly think it is about the goddamdest idea I ever heard of. It's about as absurd as asking a surgeon to fill a few of his victim's teeth after an appendectomy—medicine and dentistry being about the same thing."

Richard C. Hottelet was a bit more diplomatic in his reaction to the new device. Hottelet was covering Germany for CBS when the camera arrived. He took it over to East Berlin before the wall cut off access to that side of the city. "So I'd do demonstrations there, and rallies. And I don't know (if) what I pointed the camera at ever got on the film, or if the film got developed. Don't know if there was anything on it. Don't know if anything on it ever got on television." Hottelet promptly put the camera aside and forgot about it.

By 1953, CBS finally decided to develop its own network of film photographers around the world. Chet Burger said he got a frantic phone call one weekend. The CBS Board of Directors had decided to drop *Telenews* and create its own newsfilm service. Burger had to put together a presentation on how that could be done. The network not only wanted to use the film on its own news programs, but also to make money by selling the film to other television outlets, much as *Telenews* had been doing.

Burger had to develop a geographic list of film photographers around the country who could be called in case of a big story in their area. Those photographers might work for CBS affiliates in the particular cities, or could be freelance cameramen who also shot for newsreel companies. Plus, CBS set up arrangements with photographers in all the foreign bureaus, including Paris, London, Rome, Berlin and several others.

In May 1953, CBS-TV Director of News and Public Affairs Sig Mickelson unveiled the CBS Television Newsfilm Department. "The decision to build our own worldwide Newsfilm operation is the result of a feeling we have long had that television news calls for special handling and techniques that can best be developed through our own facilities." CBS finally had its own photographer network and *Telenews* lost its biggest client.[355]

CBS AND NBC VIDEO LEGACY

CBS's decision to farm out its newsfilm until the mid-1950s helped create an image of a network more concerned with words than pictures in television news, especially compared to NBC, which had invested in a photographer network as far back as the mid-1940s.

During the five year period CBS worked with *Telenews*, NBC continued to build its own newsfilm operation. With the money from Camel funding the entire news organization, NBC was able to establish television news bureaus in Chicago,

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[355]*Telenews* history from Fielding, 202; Scheftel quote from "INS-INP, *Telenews* Plan News Service." First service from "Radiorama," *Broadcasting,* 12 April 1948, 24; CBS contract from "Telenews-CBS Pact Opens New TV Reel System," *Variety,* 26 May 1948, 27, and "CBS TV Net and WBZ-TV To Get INS-INP Service," *Broadcasting,* 31 May 1948, 80; Bendick, Back, Hottelet, Burger quotes from interviews, (RB-OH2), (HB-OH2), (RH-OH), (CB-OH2); Howard K. Smith quote from Mickelson, *CBS in the 50s,* 27; CBS Television Newsfilm Department from "CBS Television Newsfilm Department," CBS Press Release, 19 May 1953, and 21 September 1953; Box 3E22, 1951-1954, (CB-CAH).

Washington, Cleveland, Los Angles, Dallas and San Francisco. Plus, the network developed exclusive arrangements with several foreign newsreel services. By 1952, NBC had also contracted with stringers in 36 countries, including Germany, Malaysia and Indo-China.

In 1951, NBC set up its own newsfilm syndication service, the Daily News Syndication (DNS). DNS never made money for NBC, but it allowed the network to expand its newsfilm network even more. Plus, NBC stuck with the higher quality, more expensive 35mm film format through the start of the 1950s.

The NBC expansion finally came to an end in 1953, when Camel slashed the news budget by $300,000. *Camel News Caravan* still had good ratings and strong sales, but the production costs had doubled in three years. Just at the time that Chet Burger was putting together the CBS Television Newsfilm Department, NBC was seriously considering scrapping its system and turning to *Telenews*. The network never made that move, but budget constraints at NBC allowed CBS to become competitive by developing its own newsfilm operation.

Because of the different paths the two networks took towards building a newsfilm network, NBC and CBS are often differentiated in that era by their use of newsfilm. Reuven Frank traces back NBC's roots to newsreels while pinning CBS's television beginning to that network's radio tradition. "CBS was great on interviews and talks. So when they had a piece of film it was a head, yapping. And we wanted pictures of things happening." Frank said he felt NBC had the better news product in that era because of the strong visuals and the more extensive network of stations around the country. Frank said NBC was able to go live to stories and experts in different cities much easier and more often than CBS. But at the same time, Frank said he spent his first years at NBC

trying to teach old newsreel people how to cover real news and not just emphasize cute pictures.

Over at CBS, many of the news people saw their efforts as legitimate news but considered NBC's newscast little more than a theater newsreel. Chet Burger is convinced CBS had the superior newscast in that era. "It was very much better, by any reasonable standard. By terms of content, the important stories of the day, I'm sure we had more of them covered than NBC did." Both Burger and Bendick pointed to the influence of the newsreels at NBC. "I think it was a little more CBS' dedication to the content of the news…" said Bendick, "and NBC's dedication to 'let's make it more entertaining or visually exciting.'" John Hammerslough said he still remembers the fashion reports NBC would include every week on the network newscast. "They were much more entertainment-oriented than we were," said Hammerslough, "we were news-oriented."

One CBS veteran who disagrees with the idea of CBS setting the pace in television news is photographer Larry Racies. He said he didn't compare the two newscasts very often, but he felt the rival network was leading the way whenever he encountered an NBC crew on a story. "I really thought NBC was (leading in television news) because they were spending a lot more money on it. They were shooting with 35mm (cameras) and we were shooting with amateur stuff, 16mm. I would have loved to have shot on 35mm."

Writer Gerald Green started as a writer at NBC-TV news and later moved to the *Today Show*. He remembered the emphasis of good pictures at his network. "We had a better show, but we didn't have a better news program. There was very little news anyway in a fifteen-minute newscast, but they at least tried to cover the news with their talking heads. The whole dispute in TV news back then was talking heads bad, head cracking, as we used to call it, good. People getting beat up on the street was great… It

was a more interesting show to watch, and it steadily outdrew CBS, but in telling the news it just didn't get the job done."[356]

MORE 1948 POLITICS: ELECTION NIGHT COVERAGE

Back in the fall of 1948, those plans for extensive newsfilm networks were still well in the future. At this time, NBC still contracted out its two main newscasts to 20th Century Fox-Movietone News for *Camel Newsreel Theatre*, and Jerry Fairbanks Productions for *NBC Television Newsreel*. Douglas Edwards was settling into his permanent position as news broadcaster for CBS Television News, Monday through Fridays.

The fall Presidential campaign didn't generate any of the excitement over television as had been witnessed at the political conventions. Hewitt's observations about the similarities between conventions and sporting events help explain the drop in interest during the fall. Television technicians knew how to prepare for planned events, such as a convention or election night coverage. Those events happened in one or just a few locations. The crews could spend months planning how to set up the cameras, how to split up the different network crews to handle all of the work, and then still have enough time to unspool the miles of cables and put the equipment in place. Meanwhile, the editorial side of television could assign reporters and commentators and work out a plan for coverage.

Covering a political campaign is a different matter. The candidates were constantly on the move, giving a short speech here, shaking hands outside the plant there, then zipping off to the next town for a meeting or rally. Most television stations weren't

[356]NBC newsfilm expansion from Karnick, 31-33; Burger, Bendick, Racies quotes from interviews, (CB-OH2), (RB-OH2), (LR-OH2); Green quote from Kisseloff, 365.

mobile or flexible enough to cover that kind of story. The networks certainly didn't have the staff in place to follow the candidates around the country with film cameras. Therefore, the 1948 campaign was left mostly to the veteran news media: newspapers, magazines and radio. Truman, Dewey, Wallace, and Thurmond might appear on television, but only if they happened to be in one of the cities fortunate enough to already have a television station.

Plus, the outcome had been assured by the leading pollsters during the months leading up to the election. George Gallup and Elmo Roper made numerous appearances on radio and TV with their scientific polling data which showed Dewey well in front of Truman. They stuck to those predictions all the way to election night. Since television networks and stations weren't covering the candidates on a daily basis, viewers rarely got to see the larger and larger crowds that had been turning out for Truman's rallies as November approached.

The candidates did tap into the potential of television as the days drew closer to the election. On October 25, President Truman spoke at Chicago Stadium and bought a half-hour of time on NBC's Midwest television network. With that purchase, Truman's speech wasn't only seen on all Chicago TV stations, but also ran live on television stations in Detroit, Buffalo, Toledo, Cleveland, St. Louis and Milwaukee. Dewey also spoke at Chicago Stadium that week, so a research company asked 600 television set owners what they thought of the two candidates on television. Almost three-fourths of the people questioned picked Dewey as more "telegenic" than the President. Viewers said Dewey seemed to plan his appearances on TV. "His manuscript was placed at such an angle that when he did refer to it momentarily he still appeared to be talking directly to the crowd." On the other hand, Truman "was handicapped by his glasses and the apparent

need to follow his script continuously. He clutched his speech with his right hand, gesturing only with his left."

Truman Surprise

While the campaign might have been beyond television's reach that fall, election night fit nicely into the video arena. The radio networks had been covering election night returns for more than a quarter-century by this time, so the technicians knew the needs of the reporters and commentators. Plus, the television engineers could apply all that they had learned at the conventions and improve the operation for the November broadcast.

Advertisers also knew the importance of the vote, and put in a lot of money to make sure their products would be featured on the small screen that night. The Kaiser-Frazer car company paid over $125 thousand to sponsor the ABC coverage while Nash Motors spent about the same for CBS radio and television election night broadcasts. *Life* magazine once again paired up with NBC, with the publication kicking in about $100 thousand for the opportunity of helping plan the coverage and putting its reporters on camera alongside the NBC commentators. *Newsweek* continued its affiliation with Du Mont on election night, by providing reporters to help broadcast and analyze the results on WABD-TV in New York.

By Election Day, AT&T had been able to open both the Eastern network of television stations as well as a Midwest network. But the two networks had not yet been linked together. Therefore a program broadcast on the Eastern network couldn't be seen live on the Midwest network and vice versa. Both ABC and NBC chose to present two separate television election night broadcasts, one each for East Coast and Midwest viewers. ABC brought popular columnists Walter Winchell and Drew Pearson in for their television debut on the Eastern network while H.R. Baukhage, George Hicks and others handled the Midwest telecast. NBC featured Ben Grauer and John Cameron

Swayze on its Eastern network coverage with help from various *Life* magazine reporters. CBS didn't attempt to offer coverage on the Midwest network, instead the network concentrated on its Eastern affiliates in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Boston. Douglas Edwards and Quincy Howe handled the main announcing duties on television, with help from the radio news reporters and commentators.

Marathon Coverage

The networks, as well as the sponsors, had planned for anywhere from three to five hours of coverage, especially since Dewey was expected to win the election easily. Plus, Tuesday night wasn't just election night, it had become the most important night in television. Milton Berle's *Texaco Star Theatre* had emerged as the first genuine television sensation. Eight o'clock on Tuesday nights belonged to NBC-TV in television cities across the country. So election night coverage on NBC-TV would have to wait until Uncle Miltie said goodnight at 9:00 PM on November 2, 1948.

The reporters and announcers had no idea how long they would have to wait until the country finally had a winner in the Presidential race. The easy victory for Dewey turned into a night of drama as Truman voters proved the polls wrong. ABC had made an unfortunate choice for one of its most visible commentators on election night. George Gallup appeared on the air throughout the night, at first clinging to his prediction of a Dewey victory, later admitting it had turned into a horse race, and later meekly saying the vote could be so close that the House of Representatives would be forced to decide.

NBC scattered eleven live cameras around New York City to capture the different events and parties scheduled for the evening. The network also put up a 15 by 20 foot television screen in Rockefeller Plaza where five thousand people watched the returns during the night.

CBS-TV started its coverage at 8:00 PM with Douglas Edwards, Quincy Howe, Lyman Bryson, Dwight Cooke, and Gil Fates handling the major assignments for television. CBS also featured many of the radio news broadcasters during the marathon coverage. The network converted its auditorium into election night headquarters for both radio and television. CBS installed huge tally boards which would change every 15 minutes with new vote totals. The election night studio also included a special control room to allow for instant updates during the night. Editors, writers and engineers worked around a master desk which served as the nerve center of the coverage.

But the election night set-up didn't provide enough space for the television newscasters to easily use all of the special tools designed for that night's coverage. One reviewer noticed that Edwards was so far away from the CBS vote tally boards that he resorted to using binoculars to see across the room to read his own network's election returns.

Some of the candidates, including Truman and his running mate Alben Barkley, eventually gave up and went to bed, not expecting final results until sometime Wednesday. The broadcast crews stayed on the air through the night, taxing the personnel and resources that had only been designed for a few hours of coverage. More than 130 people handled the broadcasting and vote counting in CBS's Studio 22 during the coverage, using more than 34 separate telephone lines.

CBS-TV finally signed off at 5:30 AM, with no decision on a winner. But the station didn't stay dark for long. As a network press release later described, "(i)n the dawn's early light the valiant band of CBS broadcasters waited tired and weary outside the nearest apothecary's door for a new supply of badly needed throat lozenges." CBS-TV went back on the air at 7:00 AM Wednesday and continued coverage until Dewey

conceded at 11:15 AM. NBC-TV stayed on the air continuously throughout the night until noon the next day.

Election Coverage Reviews

The C.E. Hooper ratings service conducted a special audience survey in New York City between 9:00 PM and 11:00 PM election night to gauge which television stations had the most viewers. Hooper estimated that almost three out of every four television sets were turned on that evening. The NBC-*Life* coverage had the lion's share of the audience, at 43.6 percent, followed by ABC's WJZ-TV with 20.2 percent. The Du Mont-*Newsweek* broadcast finished third with 18.4 percent, followed by WCBS, pulling in 11.1 percent of the television audience. WPIX worked with its sister paper, the *New York Daily News,* and received 6.7 percent of the audience.

The media critics were mixed in their evaluation of television's first major presidential election night. *Billboard* liked the coverage on both CBS and NBC. The reviewer said one couldn't watch the CBS coverage "without winding up with complete admiration of and respect for the determination, energy, resourcefulness, and stamina of the entire CBS staff. It was epochal reporting of an epoch." But at the same time, the magazine didn't notice anything special about the visual side of the coverage. "If there were no unusual gimmicks or evidences of top showmanship, if there was a lack of imagination, it was because of the determination to report developments as they occurred."

Also in *Billboard,* Joe Csida was almost gushing in his praise of the NBC-*Life* coverage. He predicted the coverage would go down in history as one of the most successful efforts ever on television. In addition to the eleven cameras used around New York, NBC also went live to two different locations in both Washington D.C. and Philadelphia, as well as utilizing a live camera at WBAL-TV in Baltimore. "If the

National Broadcasting Company (NBC) television job on the 1948 national election isn't a new high in public service programming, it will certainly do until the next major world event comes along."

The *New York Times* media writer, Jack Gould, had a more critical view of the television coverage on that election night. He felt the "video art fumbled rather badly in its first full-dress effort to cover the outcome of a Presidential campaign." Gould didn't like the election charts used to count the votes on the different channels because he had trouble reading them. He said all of the television stations were "caught napping" when they didn't present Dewey's concession speech live Wednesday morning.

Concerning individual station efforts, Gould apparently missed the history-making elements of the NBC-*Life* broadcast. Instead, he found it to be "almost incredibly pretentious and self-conscious." He felt the pairing of NBC and *Life* reporters all night "was just a case of muscle-bound overproduction and the terrific build-up attendant to almost every interview seldom was justified by the results." Gould had little to say about CBS's efforts, other than the network "turned in a professional news job, though it was far from inspired visually."[357]

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[357]TV speeches from "Time for Truman," *Broadcasting,* 25 October 1948, 26; comparing TV styles from "Survey Finds Dewey is more Telegenic," *Broadcasting,* 1 November 1948, 48; election coverage from Betty Stone, "Election Roundup," *Broadcasting,* 25 October 1948, 26, CBS apothecary visit from "CBS' Coverage of the Election…," CBS Press Release, 3 November 1948; CBS News 1948 Press Releases; (CBS-RL); Gould comments from Jack Gould, "Radio and Television Cover the Election," 7 November 1948, sec. 2, p. 11; *Billboard* reviews from K. Kemper, "CBS Telemen Election Cast Wins Laurels," and Joe Csida, "NBC's Socko Election Job…," both *Billboard,* 13 November 1948, 8-10; other election coverage from "Radio and TV's Big Story," *Broadcasting,* 8 November 1948, 23; "Network's Nationwide 1948 Coverage..," CBS Press Release, 21 October 1948; CBS News 1948 Press Releases; (CBS-RL), Von Schilling, 110-112.

1948 FILLED WITH MORE SURPRISES

The fall Presidential election didn't command all of the attention of the broadcasting industry in the second half of 1948. During that same period, William Paley finally won a major battle against his arch-rival, David Sarnoff of NBC. Plus, the FCC made a decision not to decide, which would stunt the geographic growth of television for more than three years.

Radio Raid

If William Paley wasn't paying close attention to the television expansion in the fall of 1948, it may have been because he was cooking up a coup for that other CBS network: radio. Paley found out about a tax loophole which would result in CBS stealing some of the biggest names in radio from NBC.

Anyone making over $70 thousand a year, including top radio stars, paid more than three-fourths of that money in taxes. But if those stars sold their programs as corporations, they would not only make the money on the sale, but they would be subject to a much lower tax rate and could still make their hefty salary from the buyer. Paley announced the first defection in September 1948 when the creators of "Amos 'n' Andy" sold to CBS. Next, Paley convinced Jack Benny to make the move. Eventually, Bing Crosby, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Edgar Bergen, and Red Skelton joined their former NBC radio stars over on the Columbia network. Over a period of just a few months, CBS had stolen many of the biggest names in network radio. Many of the same performers would play a big role in the later development of the CBS Television Network.[358]

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[358]CBS radio raid from "CBS Gets Jack Benny," *Broadcasting,* 29 November 1948, 4; Smith, 260-266,

FCC Freeze

By the start of October 1948, television stations were signing on the air seemingly every week while manufacturers rushed new sets to anywhere a signal could be received. More than 600 thousand television sets now sat in living rooms and taverns around the country. New York already had six stations, Los Angeles boasted four different signals, while Washington, Philadelphia, and Chicago each had three. Close to 40 thousand television sets had already been sold in places like Dallas, Miami, Peoria and San Francisco; cities that didn't even have stations on the air yet.

This spread of stations and sets inspired others to push for their own television outlets. The FCC had more than 300 applications for new stations around the country. The agency realized the demand for stations would soon fill up the entire VHF spectrum set aside for television. Plus, government engineers had concerns about how closely stations on the same channel could be located. Finally, the FCC decided to stop the process. The commission stopped taking applications for new stations and wouldn't act on the hundreds of requests already on file. FCC Chairman Wayne Coy didn't want to predict how long the freeze would last, but he estimated six or nine months might be needed to revisit and study the entire process.

That "interim procedure" lasted more than three and a half years. The FCC created a nation of television have and have-nots. At the time of the freeze in 1948, 37 stations were already on the air. The FCC had approved construction permits for 86 other television outlets. In the end, 108 television stations signed on the air either before or during the FCC freeze. Those stations were free from extra competition and had the spectrum to themselves. As a result, the television experience contrasted sharply around the country. During the freeze, viewers in New York and Los Angeles could choose from as many as seven different television stations every night. But in places like Austin,

Texas; Portland, Oregon; and Little Rock, Arkansas; people wouldn't be able to enjoy their first station until at least 1952.

The freeze also hit CBS hard and slowed down the network's plans for video expansion. During 1948, CBS was still playing catch-up from its ill-fated decision to drop VHF station applications during the color fight the previous year. By stopping the growth of television in 1948, the FCC locked in NBC as the most dominant television network with the most affiliates for the duration of the freeze.[359]

NO TURNING BACK

The people at CBS Television News had witnessed unbelievable changes during 1948. After years of hearing about how television would eventually catch fire, the reality finally matched the predictions. A year before, they were preparing a newscast for roughly 75 thousand television sets in the New York City area. By the start of 1949, that local New York broadcast had turned into a network news program, as CBS expanded to 30 affiliates either already on the air, or waiting to turn on the transmitter. In January 1949, the potential live audience multiplied even more when the Eastern and Midwest networks were joined by coaxial cable. A television network could now offer a program live from Boston to Milwaukee and from St. Louis to Richmond.

The pace and amount of work had dramatically increased. At the start of 1948, CBS-TV news might be on just once or twice a week, depending on broadcasting hours. Now, the crew had to produce a 15-minute newscast five days a week. At the end of 1947, the news department was still experimenting with different announcers on the program, with no allegiance to a particular person. By the start of 1949, Douglas

[359] freeze information from Rufus Crater, "Television Freeze," *Broadcasting,* 4 October 1948, 22A; "TV Set Surge," *Broadcasting,* 8 November 1948, 71; Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty,* 112-114; Von Schilling, 109-110, 180-181.

Edwards had made the commitment to television and in just a few short years, the newscast would be renamed *Douglas Edwards with the News.*

The size and complexion of the staff had changed during the year. CBS-TV hired more directors, writers, researchers, and engineers. Ed Chester had taken over as the boss of the television news department. The department now had consistent access to newsfilm every day, with the addition of the *Telenews* service. Famous radio newsmen like Edward R. Murrow, Charles Collingwood, Howard K. Smith and others had received their first taste of television news through their work on convention and election coverage. By November 1948, 220 people worked at WCBS, including 77 on the technical side, 53 in programming and another 28 in production.[360]

Early studies of television viewers hinted the medium might be responsible for dramatic changes in how people were spending their leisure time. On Tuesday nights, when Milton Berle hosted *Texaco Star Theatre,* restaurant owners noticed diners rushing through their dinners before the broadcast, much the same as they had noticed decades earlier for Roosevelt's fireside chats on radio.

A study of both television viewers and people without sets in New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles showed a dramatic decrease in other leisure time activities with the addition of the small screen. Non-television viewers averaged a little over three hours a day reading, listening to the radio and records, or engaged in other hobbies. The television viewers spent less than 90 minutes a day on similar activities. The *New York Times'* Jack Gould sarcastically noted the change in television homes: "The family's evening is not tainted with such an archaic pursuit as one person talking to another, a practice, it may be recalled, which once was known as conversation."

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[360]The network did not list news as a separate department in its employment figures.

The television news people at CBS had little time to reflect on the meteoric growth of television during these years. A new deadline hovered over their heads every day when they went into work. The excitement and exhaustion of election night had to be quickly pushed aside. Bob Bendick and the rest of the crew had to get busy on the complicated pool coverage that would be needed for Truman's inauguration in January. Each new challenge became another television first, another chance for more people to watch and judge the efforts at bringing the news into the home via the video signal.

ANOTHER ELECTION NIGHT SURPRISE

One critical member of the CBS Television News Department wouldn't be continuing with the team into the opportunities and larger audiences that would be waiting in 1949. Henry Cassirer found out he had no future with CBS-TV news on, of all occasions, Election Night.

Cassirer had been handling local election returns from the Grand Central Terminal studios that night so he wasn't in the main studio with the rest of the radio and television staff. As he watched on the monitor while Douglas Edwards strained with his binoculars to see the election board over in the radio studios, Cassirer wondered if the network had forgotten all the important visualization skills the television crew had been learning for the past several years. The hard-to-read election numbers reminded Cassirer of those first confusing war maps he watched on WCBW back in 1944. "Here in the radio studio we were back at the point at which I had come into television, there was no awareness that the new medium required (a) different graphic presentation to be effective and understandable."[361]

[361]WCBS size from WCBS FCC License Renewal Application, 27 January 1949; WCBS 12/14/46-7/1/51; FCC-DB; Berle effect from "The Child Wonder," *Time,* 16 May 1949, 70; leisure time

When Cassirer and the staff finished the local returns at Grand Central, he headed over to the main studios to watch the unfolding drama of Truman's dramatic victory. Ed Chester came up to him and brought Cassirer out into a hallway. Chester said he was sorry to drop such bad news on such an important night, but he had decided to replace Cassirer with Lawrence Haas, who would assume the title of Coordinator of News for CBS-TV. Chester didn't offer Cassirer any other positions within the news department and urged him to just quit the network.

At the time he left CBS, colleagues had high praise for Cassirer through their letters of recommendation as he looked for new work. Quincy Howe said Cassirer's experience made him "singularly qualified for any radio or television news work that requires initiative and experience." Vice President Larry Lowman said Cassirer "came in at a time when we were formulating a news service in television without any particular pattern to go by. He helped edit news in a new medium which required considerable ingenuity. He was able to add much to a growing service which is now an important part of our programming." Douglas Edwards said his former news editor had a skill for producing television news which "is unique in the industry." The man who would become one of the most famous names out of early CBS-TV news, Don Hewitt, realized the depth of Cassirer's experience at a time when Hewitt was still new. Hewitt wrote that Cassirer "probably knows more about television news than anyone else in the business. Not only would he be a valuable addition to any television station, but I believe a news and special events department could be built around him."[362]

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study from "Video Survey," *Broadcasting,* 20 December 1948, 31; Gould quote from Jack Gould, *Watching Television Come of Age: The New York Times Reviews,* ed. Lewis L. Gould (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002) 190; adding Midwest network from "East Meets Midwest," *Time,* 17 January 1949, 68; Cassirer quote from Cassirer, *Seeds,* 182, and interview, (HC-OH).

[362]Howe, Lowman, Edwards and Hewitt quotes from letters of recommendation; Business Correspondence; (HC-CAH); Cassirer's election night and firing from Cassirer, 182-183, Cassirer, Chapter 6, Cassirer interview, (HC-OH); and Kisseloff, 362.

Chester never told Cassirer why he lost his job in the news department. His replacement, Haas, a friend of Chester's, had little impact and didn't last long at CBS-TV news. Because he worked in a period when few people had television sets and newscasts couldn't easily be recorded, Henry Cassirer's contributions to CBS's early television news efforts are mostly lost to history. Little is known about him by CBS news people who gravitated to television as it increased its power and importance in the 1950s.

Cassirer himself admits he constantly struggled with the pull between getting out the information and the "show biz" side of making the newscast interesting. To the end, he clung to his vision of presenting in-depth news on television, even as most broadcasters felt the medium would be best suited to more of a headline service or newsreel format. In addition, during the early days when most people couldn't see it, when his radio peers ridiculed it, and when so many others had yet to see the future in it, television news couldn't have had a stronger supporter than Henry Cassirer:

> Television news is the visual and oral report of all sides of our contemporary life. It tells you of world conflicts and local affairs, it shows the lighter side and the tragedies that make world headlines. The Television news editor has unique opportunities and a unique responsibility. The visual impression is the strongest, and the visual presentation of news can have the most formative effect in the information and enlightenment of the public. Failure to use Television to its fullest potentialities is a denial of the great contribution which this new medium can make.[363]

After losing his news editor position, Cassirer stayed with CBS-TV for another seven months working on public affairs programming. A program on human rights with Eleanor Roosevelt led to the next chapter of his life, a long career with UNESCO promoting the use of radio and television for education on a global scale.

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[363]Cassirer, "Television News is Different."

Henry Cassirer never worked in TV news again. Over in radio news, Bob Skedgell still didn't own a television set.

Chapter 9

A Modernist and Professional Approach to Negotiating Emerging Technology and Presenting News on a New Format

In September 1951, Chet Burger sent a note to his boss, Bob Bendick. In the detailed, thoughtful memo, Burger suggested a re-evaluation of the content of CBS-TV news. He wanted to push beyond the Washington political stories as well as the latest summaries from the wire services: "For some time now, I have had a feeling that a certain sameness was creeping into our TV news programs, that a hard pattern had developed in our TV news coverage, even though the faces and details varied from one night to the next."

Consider the date of the memo when compared to some of the more celebrated signposts in early television. In September 1951, Walter Cronkite would still have to wait another year before gaining fame as the "anchorman" at the political conventions. In September 1951, two-and-a-half years would pass before RCA started building color television sets. In September 1951, Edward R. Murrow hadn't even hit the air with *See It Now*.

Yet, by September 1951, Burger felt that CBS-TV news was already in a rut, constrained by hard-and-fast rules on content. He would be in good position to know. By September 1951, 30-year-old Chet Burger would have been considered one of the old men of the television news department, with more than five-and-a-half years of

experience. The Burger memo hints at the importance of understanding the work he and the others had done during the previous years, before the "hard pattern" had been set.

The preceding chapters attempted to redraw the lines of determining when television news began as well as establish a clear lineage of CBS-TV news dating back to the pre-war broadcasts. By providing the landscape for the birth and evolution of television news, an examination of the 1940s CBS video newscasts also covers a significant, yet mostly unexplored, era in the medium's development.

What follows are further attempts to answer some of the most important questions involved in these early newscasts. First, a discussion of why this era deserves attention even though the audience was relatively small and the bigger names in broadcast journalism had yet to get involved in television. Then, an exploration of the influences which helped shape the look and content of those newscasts, which in turn affected the development of television news, even to the present day. The unique moment in time strips away many of today's most accepted influences and reveals a strong kinship with newspaper journalists of that era, who were going through their own significant changes in presentation and purpose.[364]

BEFORE THE "HARD PATTERN" OF TV NEWS: NEGOTIATING A FORMAT

The CBS news people of the 1940s admit they did a lot of talking and maybe some arguing. They had meetings on coverage plans, on visualization ideas, on what happened on the newscast the night before, or any combination of the above.

The CBS-TV news crew felt it was mostly free to create whatever type of newscast would work best given the existing technology and budget. They of course

[364]Chester Burger, CBS Memo to Bob Bendick, 28 September 1951; Box 3E21, Scrapbook 1947-1951; (CB-CAH).

were drawing from their experiences, either through work or as consumers, with existing news media, including newspapers, magazines, radio, and the theater newsreels. But they were determined not to mimic another medium's news format for video. Instead, they wanted to come up with a new presentation, unique to television.

Television presented an empty canvas of sorts for journalism, therefore these news pioneers didn't have a "hard pattern" to follow. They instead chose to come up with their own ideas on first, what should be included in a 15-minute television newscast, and then, how could those stories be presented visually.

Bob Bendick said the crew was passionate about debating all issues of both news and television. "Always, there was always a news conference, (in) two parts," said Bendick. "One was to critique the past one (newscast), and then to see what items were up for the broadcast that night, but there was much discussion of techniques." These sessions are reminiscent of the early days when Gilbert Seldes and his group would shoot film of football games or even waves crashing into shore and then spend hours debating what would work on the small screen.

Since the news department didn't have a clear leader who could quickly stop the debate with a concrete decision, many of these people had more-or-less an equal say in the structure and content of the newscast.[365] Therefore, the debates could be long and spirited. Bendick said he didn't like to limit the discussion because he knew the crew was filled with great ideas and strong opinions, even though he admitted with a laugh that the meetings could turn into small riots.

Even from the perspective of a competitor, CBS had the reputation of engaging in lengthy debates on news issues. Reuven Frank watched the rise of television news from

[365]Even when Ed Chester took over television news in 1948, the news people say he rarely got involved in day-today decisions on content or presentation.

his early position as writer of the NBC *Camel News Caravan.* "CBS always had more internal debates than we had," said Frank. "It was a very lawyerly organization. We always thought they were kind of silly. We didn't have that kind of debate. We really didn't."

Frank may have not been the only person to think such lengthy debates on television news were "silly." For those who measured importance by audience size, CBS-TV news discussions in 1946 revolved around a program that at best could reach fewer than 4 thousand homes. Compared to their radio counterparts, the television news crew had almost no impact with the audience and was an afterthought at best within its own media network.[366]

If television had never caught on with the public, if the medium had sunk into obscurity as another failed invention, these debates over visualization and news might not hold much value. But even though the audience size was miniscule while they argued over formats, within ten years, television would be the most powerful medium in the United States. By the 1952 political conventions, between 17 and 18 million American homes had television sets. By 1963, more people relied on television for news than any other media format, including newspapers, magazines and radio.

But focusing attention only after people start relying on a medium misses a critical era in the development. By the time an audience has gathered around a source, much of the negotiations over purpose and mission are well in the past. Routines have already been developed. Limits have already been set. A "hard pattern" of processes and purposes might already be guiding the product.

A critical time in a medium's development occurs well before it becomes powerful, when the early practitioners are arguing and negotiating its role in society.

[366]Bendick, Frank quotes from interviews, (RB-OH2), (RF-OH2).

These negotiations can provide an important view into how and why a medium developed in a certain direction and can also give us glimpse of the roads not taken.

Carolyn Marvin warns against using the audience size as the starting point for the study of mass media. In her research on electric communications, *When Old Technologies Were New,* she traces technology back from public acceptance to focus on the social history of that technology in the late 19th Century. For Marvin, the debates, discussions, and negotiations involved in those early years were just as important as the technological breakthroughs and the later attention from a large audience: "Media are not fixed, natural objects. They have no natural edges. They are constructed complexes of habits, beliefs, and procedures embedded in elaborate cultural codes of communication."

She studied how electricians and engineers argued and debated the proper uses for electricity, electric light, and even telephones. These conversations would often occur within the pages of trade magazines since the public had yet to embrace the emerging technologies: "Here the focus of communication is shifted from the instrument to the drama in which existing groups perpetually negotiate power, authority, representation, and knowledge with whatever resources were available." Within the CBS-TV news department, those negotiations took place face-to-face, around the conference table during the daily meetings concerning content and presentation. In addition to trying to convince each other, some of the CBS-TV people also took their knowledge and views outside of the news meetings and attempted to convince other stations or the viewers of a proper approach to television news. Much of Cassirer's writings on early television centers around his ideas on the proper format for news on the new medium.

Even though Marvin's research centers on technology preceding television, her insights help explain the importance of the CBS-TV newscast debates as well as the resistance from other journalists:

> New media…are always introduced into a pattern of tension created by the coexistence of old and new, which is far richer than any single medium that becomes a focus of interest because it is novel. New media embody the possibility that accustomed orders are in jeopardy, since communication is a peculiar kind of interaction that actively seeks variety. No matter how firmly custom or instrumentality may appear to organize and contain it, it carries the seeds of its own subversion.[367]

The lengthy debates over the proper role of television as a news source in the 1940s are critical because the accepted norms, formats and processes for gathering and presenting news were being challenged, and they were being challenged by a group that was largely unknown to the established broadcast news community, let alone the journalists of the print media. That questioning of format and news processes would definitely be uncomfortable to those who had based their careers on the routines and expectations of other news media.

TAKING THEIR JOBS VERY SERIOUSLY

By the middle of 1947, Henry Cassirer had already been working as a television news editor for more than three years. He had not only worked on the CBS-TV newscasts, he had watched the news efforts at other television stations. In a manuscript he wrote that year directed at fellow television journalists, Cassirer was quite critical of stations that did little more than point a camera at a radio announcer. "This type of program makes me forget Television. I merely listen to the report, treating my Television like a radio…." He also found fault with the editor of the newsreel-style newscasts that

[367]Marvin quotes "not fixed objects," "focus of communications," "pattern of attention" from Marvin, 5-8.

were limited to stories with pictures. "Where is the news from Indonesia or about Senator Taft's political campaign in the West? It is not there, because the editor just does not happen to have film about these topics, and does not know any other way to present them effectively on Television." Cassirer definitely believed in the CBS format of mixing different visual elements within one newscast and he was pushing his fellow video pioneers to continue to experiment with the medium: "The visual impression is the strongest, and the visual presentation of news can have the most formative effect in the information and enlightenment of the public. Failure to use Television to its fullest potentialities is a denial of the great contribution which this new medium can make."

In 1947, Chet Burger hadn't even been working in television news for a year but he also had become a believer in the CBS practice of mixing film, graphics, still pictures, animations, and even the commentator on camera within the newscast. In an article for the New York Newspaper Guild in January 1947, the CBS-TV News Visualizer echoed Cassirer's call for a unique format using all resources:

> Taken together, they constitute a fast-moving program which tries to give its audience an integrated, complete, and fresh summary of the latest world news, with the "video" adding to the clarity and understanding of the "audio" delivery. Although this formula requires much improvement, expansion and development, nevertheless by its very completeness, it points the way to the television news technique of the future.[368]

Burger and Cassirer might be engaging in a little boosterism of both their newscast and television in general, but the passion they have for their new journalistic platform is obvious. Their writings definitely fit into Marvin's idea of the importance of the social history of a technology as the uses and purposes are negotiated. Plus, these writings are further evidence that these people were definitely thinking a little harder

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[368]Cassirer, "Television News is Different;"; Burger quote from Chester F.X. Burger, "Television Uses Fresh Techniques," *Frontpage: Magazine of the N.Y. Newspaper Guild,* January 1947, 1; Box 3E20, Scrapbook Vol. 2, 1942-47; (CB-CAH).

about their newscasts than the popular off-hand descriptions of "glorified newsreel," or Kendrick's "on-camera reading of brief press bulletins."

Several of the people involved in these CBS-TV newscasts stressed the importance of debate and discussion both before and after the newscasts. They genuinely felt as if they had an important job with serious consequences. These news people were not only attempting to continue the CBS News reputation of excellence on a new medium, but they also seriously struggled with the role news should fill on television. In the end, those discussions, debates, visualization decisions, and newscast presentations did matter. The CBS-TV news crew created, massaged, altered, and improved the basic template which television newscasts use to this day. Their arguments over non-visual stories, importance of the person reading the news, length of topics and so many other characteristics of television news are still being debated to this day.

LIMITED INFLUENCE FROM TODAY'S USUAL SUSPECTS

But how did these people reach their decisions on how to present news on television? Instead of just producing a 15-minute program for a small experimental television station, why did they feel they had such an important duty to fulfill? Trying to use today's answers to those questions ends in a hopeless case of presentism.[369] The influences on news content and presentation taken for granted in the 21st Century don't begin to explain the work of this small group of people in Grand Central Terminal in the mid-1940s.

[369]Presentism or present-mindedness is the act of viewing the past in terms of the present. Startt and Sloan say an important part of historical research involves a true historical understanding of the era under study. The researcher must be able to "recapture the sense of the spirit of the times," and to "comprehend the feelings, persuasions and emotions that once were real," Startt and Sloan, 44.

Sociologists and other researchers spent a considerable amount of time in the last 40 years of the 20th Century studying the influences on news content. Instead of settling for the old crutch of objectivity and spontaneity of news occurrences, they dug deeper to find important influences on how stories were chosen and how the coverage was determined. Some of the most important influences on news content discovered in that research included management pressure, audience feedback, the stifling rigors of news routines, even the monetary stake of the advertisers. But surprisingly, these pressures played a relatively minor role in the content and presentation of CBS-TV News in the 1940s.

Influence From Above: Management

Chet Burger worked at CBS for 14 years and saw the founder and leader of the company a total of one time. He remembers William Paley coming over to the Grand Central Terminal studio, possibly for a color television demonstration. Cassirer said he never saw Paley during his time at CBS. The television operation wasn't only physically removed from CBS headquarters, but it also occupied a much lower rung in importance than CBS radio in the 1940s. The television crew has few memories of seeing either Paul Kesten or Frank Stanton over at the station during that period as well. Kesten worked as Paley's right-hand man until his resignation in August 1946, which is when Stanton became the President of CBS, with Paley acting as the CBS Chairman

Bob Bendick had more interaction with the high levels of CBS because of his management role as Director of News and Special Events from 1946 to 1948. Bendick said he would be involved in periodic meetings on television, but those sessions always took place at CBS headquarters. In those meetings, Bendick said Paley and Stanton focused on the big picture of television. Often, they needed to gain enough information for their periodic trips to Capitol Hill to testify on broadcast issues. Bendick said he

never received any pressure for the type of news to cover on television or even the format for the newscast.

For Paley, Stanton, and Kesten during much of this period, the overarching issue was the fight over color television. They were determined to stop NBC from dominating a television industry based on black-and-white stations all located on the VHF spectrum. Through the start of 1947, they viewed the WCBW operation as just a short-term offering until they could convince the FCC to allow for commercial licenses for color television stations. After the defeat of CBS color and the proliferation of black-and-white sets in 1947, the network finally felt compelled to devote more resources and attention to the VHF station in New York.

Grand Central Autonomy

Even within the small group of television employees at Grand Central Terminal, the news crew had little interaction with the people in charge of WCBW. Back in 1941, Bob Skedgell might have asked Gilbert Seldes to look over his copy during the first month of the newscast, but Skedgell quickly started working out of the radio newsroom, for more guidance from journalists.

Seldes also directed some of the early newscasts, but he didn't get involved in the editorial side of the newscast. Worthington Miner stayed away from the news effort and concentrated on the ballet, vaudeville and drama programming on the station.

When Paley's college buddy and long-time CBS employee Larry Lowman took over television in 1946, his involvement in the news product was even less than Seldes or Miner. Lowman may have worked out of the same cavernous space above Grand Central Station as the news department, but members of the news staff say they rarely had any interaction with Lowman. By the fall of 1946, the television station had ballooned to 102 employees yet Lowman still believed television was "some years" from having an

impact. Even when Edmund Chester replaced Bob Bendick as Director of News in 1948, Chester didn't have direct daily involvement with the newscast.

Who's The Boss?

The work flow was so fluid and the titles were so vague in this era, even finding the person in charge of the news effort isn't an easy task. The people involved all shy away from pointing to a particular person, and instead play up the importance of teamwork and discussion in all decisions at CBS-TV News. On paper, Leo Hurwitz was the Director of News until he left in August 1946. When he left, he took credit for creating the news format and for the "gathering and training" of the staff including Burger, Cassirer, Fred Rickey and others. Cassirer credits Hurwitz for his contributions to the visualization of the newscast, but Burger saw Hurwitz as mostly a good photographer and editor with little understanding of news.

After Hurwitz left, Bob Bendick's duties expanded to include Director of News and Special Events. When asked if the title made him the boss and gave him the final say on news decisions, Bendick pointedly avoided such an authoritarian picture of his job: "when you have people like Doug Edwards and Don Hewitt, you don't quickly overrule situations, because they had wise heads. The best news comes when you get the best opinions on what the value of the story is, so I could, maybe I did on occasion, but it was not my way, necessarily."

Henry Cassirer could also make a case for his influence over the early newscasts. After all, a news editor in both radio and newspapers had considerable say over content decisions. Plus, Cassirer was involved in hiring Burger, Olden and others. But Cassirer hedged his role when asked if he was considered the boss: "I think I was considered Henry. I never had any pretension of being a boss. The boss was Larry Lowman, but the responsibility was mine." Even Chet Burger, during his early years as the visualizer,

bristles at the idea that someone would give him an assignment: "First of all, nobody gave me anything. It was a very collaborative effort. Henry Cassirer wasn't an authoritative (person). He had a strong personality (with) definite ideas, but he wasn't authoritarian." Cassirer said the key to the early staff was the give and take of ideas and the willingness to try new approaches and fill in on various duties to get the newscast ready. [370]

From the leaders at Grand Central all the way up to the Chairman of CBS, the people of CBS-TV news in the mid-1940s say they felt no pressure or influence from management on the content or direction of CBS-TV News. Instead, they say the decisions came from a collaborative effort amongst a small group working to find the best way to present news on television.

Influence From "Below:" Audience

The audience plays a major role in today's media, as companies spend a considerable amount of time and money polling, analyzing and predicting what people like and why. Television shows are promoted or dumped, radio formats are shuffled, and movie endings magically change depending on the customers. The likes and dislikes of the people who watch television or movies or listen to the radio are constantly studied, analyzed, checked and computed. In television news, especially on the local level, anchors are hired and fired, sets are demolished and rebuilt, slogans are plastered on billboards, and even the stories covered within the broadcast are altered depending on the size and demographics of the people who are watching or should be watching the

[370]Lowman quote from "Our Respects To—Lawrence Wise Lowman," *Broadcasting,* 19 August 1946, 54, 56: Hurwitz contribution from Leo Hurwitz, "A Few Random Words of Goodbye," CBS Memo, 1 August 1946; Box 3E20, Scrapbook Vol. 2, 1942-1947; (CB-CAH); Bendick, Cassirer, and Burger quotes from interviews, (RB-OH2), (HC-OH), (CB-OH2).

program. Critics say today's broadcast news has become the product of Nielsen ratings, audience research, and consultant recommendations.

The effect of the audience on news decisions is almost non-existent in the 1940s at CBS-TV. The news people claim they had almost no interaction with the viewer in any way. They don't remember phone calls or letters from viewers. Many have no memory of any kind of ratings numbers for their newscasts. These people demonstrate a strong responsibility to some unseen "public," but at the same time claim that nobody was watching.

For Cassirer, the staff had the courage to try new ideas and experiment with visual formats because of the invisible audience. "We had the great privilege of not having an audience, no commercial audience. So if we made errors, we made errors. But my job was to watch the performance of the program and correct the errors the next time." Burger doesn't remember any kind of audience reaction to what they were doing in the early years. He said the only figure he ever heard was that three thousand TV sets had been sold in New York City before the war and he had suspicions that many of those sets no longer worked because of age and change in signal standards. "In any case, the audience was very, very small," remembered Burger. "No feedback at all from the audience, no such thing as audience panels, viewer groups and so on."

CBS-TV Research

Burger may not have been aware of the work, but during those early years, CBS did research the potential television audience. In 1945, the CBS Television Audience Research Institute first studied people who had never watched television. The next year, CBS researchers focused their attention on the people in New York who were watching those pre-war sets.

CBS interviewed 517 television families watching the estimated 38 hundred sets that were still working. From those interviewed, CBS determined that the majority of the men in the TV families had white collar jobs and quarter of them had incomes higher than $10 thousand a year. On an average, even with the limited programming offered by the three New York stations in 1946, families watched TV five nights a week, and more than 30 percent had the set on every day. Almost nine out of ten said they missed television "very much" when the three stations were off the air to change their transmission signals in the spring of 1946. The two most popular types of programs were sports, especially for the men, and drama, number one for the women. Informational and news programs only came up as one of several program types the audience would like to see expanded.

News Autonomy

Distance from management might have only been part of the reason the television news people didn't know about company research. One of the attributes of Paley's leadership style often voiced by the CBS news veterans is that he rarely got involved in news issues. The radio news people on the 17th floor at 485 Madison Avenue felt they were autonomous and protected from other parts of the company. Bob Skedgell worked at CBS for 45 years and said he never spoke to Paley in all those years, even though most of the time the two men were in the same building. "If it was a big story, I never saw them come down to the newsroom floor at 485…to look over your shoulder. That's not to say they weren't in contact with my bosses... (but) you always had the feeling they were letting you do your job."

Even into the early 1950s, news people at both main networks still spoke of little viewer interaction or knowledge of audience ratings. Over at NBC, Reuven Frank started as a news writer in 1950. He says he never saw any audience mail until after the network

paired Chet Huntley and David Brinkley on the anchor desk to challenge CBS in 1956. Over at CBS, Philip Scheffler started in the early 1950s before going into the service. Even when he returned in 1955, he said there was little discussion of who was watching. "I had no idea who was watching…how many… News was so far down the totem pole that they didn't even bother to measure the size of the audience."

Modern day broadcast journalists dream of a news world that doesn't involve ratings and research. But in reality, television programs, including newscasts, were measured for audience size in Scheffler's era. In fact, as far back as November 1948, the Hooper ratings service measured the audience size for all of the stations providing coverage on election night. More general Hooper ratings for newscasts date back to the beginning of 1948.

Howard Back was even further removed from television news viewers. In the early 1950s, he worked as an assignment editor for *Telenews,* a newsreel company which supplied CBS with newsfilm. Back said he had the feeling television was too new for much critical analysis by the audience during that time. "There was no real comparison so what they saw on television was sort of a hodge-podge of something drawn from each of the other media. And I think in the early days they accepted whatever they got and were very grateful…" [371]

To put the invisible television audience in perspective, here are some numbers. Industry leaders estimated anywhere between 8 and 10 thousand television sets were sold before the war. By the end of 1946, when postwar sets had just gone on sale, an estimated 12 thousand receivers were in homes and businesses around the country, the largest concentration in New York City. Close to 225 thousand sets were built in 1947

[371]CBS research from Donald Horton, "They Like Video But Look to the Future," *Broadcasting,* 7 October 1946, 16; Cassirer, Burger, Skedgell, Frank, Scheffler, and Back quotes from interviews, (HC-OH), (CB-OH2), (RS-OH2), (RF-OH1), (PS-OH),(HB-OH2).

and close to a million were sold in 1948. By the start of 1950, 4 million sets were located in the U.S. cities that already had television stations.[372]

Influence From Within: Media Routines

When Edward Jay Epstein studied the three main network newscasts starting in 1968 for his book *News From Nowhere*, he quickly threw aside the idea of an independent press. Epstein began to view the news department as a business organization. He determined that content and presentation were most affected by the routines and budget constraints built into the process of gathering and producing the network newscast. This routinization of the news process forced the individual journalists to adapt their beliefs and experience to fit the accepted work arrangement of that particular network newsroom. According to Epstein, the end result is a newscast built largely because of organizational considerations:

> To maintain themselves in competitive world, the networks impose a set of prior restraints, rule and conditions on the operation of their news divisions. Budgets are set for the production of news, time is scheduled for its presentation, and general policies are laid down concerning its content. To satisfy these requirements—and keep their jobs—news executives and producers formulate procedures, systems, and politics intended to reduce the uncertainties of news to manageable proportions. The timing, length, content and cost of news thereby become predictable.[373]

Other researchers have picked up on this idea of the pressures of conforming to the routines of a newsroom. Shoemaker and Reese created a bullseye-looking model of five concentric circles to represent media content influences. Starting from the center circle, they considered the main influences to be individual, media routines, organizational, extramedia, and ideological. For Shoemaker and Reese, the media

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[372]Television set figures from *1947 Radio Annual,* 1003; *1948 Radio Annual,* 1047, 1080; *1949 Radio Annual,* 37; *1950 Radio Annual,* 37.

[373]Epstein, 258.

routines influence is important because "people are social creatures and they participate in patterns of action that they themselves did not create." [374]

Trying to affix this type of influence onto the work of the 1940s CBS-TV news crew is difficult at best. With a new medium, these people were trying to develop their own processes. They were rejecting the efforts of other stations to take the routines of radio or the newsreels and moving them wholesale over to television. The CBS crew was attempting to meld together different elements into a new format for news. People like Bob Skedgell and Henry Cassirer, who had spent time in the CBS radio newsroom, certainly brought some of those practices over to television. They relied heavily on the news wires and attempted to build a rundown that reflected the top stories, and not just the topics that would be the easiest to visualize. But they quickly learned the importance of contemplating the visual possibilities from the very beginning of the process. Unlike their radio counterparts, they could no longer work on a script alone until air time. Now they had to work with film developing and editing, artist concerns for graphics, and production details needed to prepare the newscast for a live presentation.

These people were definitely influenced by the constraints of the technology they had at their disposal, but they weren't limited by stifling routines or "hard patterns" of coverage. They hadn't yet even been able to divvy up job responsibilities in an orderly manner. CBS found out how versatile this small team had become when the company attempted to put all employees into job categories in 1947. Here are the four main duties listed on Chet Burger's job classification sheet: A.) Participates in Selection of Film News and Secures Information and Material For Them, B.) Prepares and Edits Information and Material for Film News Stories, C.) Writes Commentary for Film News

[374]Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content,* 2d ed. (White Plains, NY: Longman, 1991) 105-106.

Stories, and D.) Assists in Production of Film News Stories. Those are just the main categories of his job description. In the sub categories, Burger is also responsible for writing at least half of the newscast, helping decide what stories to cover, researching stories and providing background to camera crews, helping direct the newscast as well as cueing the commentator at the appropriate times.

The CBS-TV news team had a variety of challenges and constraints in developing a format and delivering the news on a regular basis. But because these news people were involved in a new format on a new medium, they were not constrained by pre-existing routines and expectations.[375]

Influence from Outside: Advertisers

WCBW-TV news didn't get much attention in the pages of *Broadcasting* magazine during the mid-1940s. That magazine was, and still is, one of the main sources of information on the latest news in radio and television. *Broadcasting* certainly didn't agree with CBS's efforts to stop black-and-white television, and the magazine generally gave more space to the efforts of NBC and RCA in television.

But in the June 24, 1946 issue, back on page 93, is a picture of a group of well-dressed men standing around a television camera. In the obviously staged format that was so popular with *Broadcasting* photographs in that era, these men are seriously staring at the contraption while the commercial manager for WCBW, George Moscovics, points and "explains the functions of the camera," according to the caption. The WCBW personnel who actually ran those cameras probably got a kick out of that description, but just the placement of that photograph signaled an important moment for the station. Moscovics was surrounded by men from the Young and Rubicam advertising agency.

[375]Burger job description from "CBS Job Description, 24 November 1947; Box 3E21, Scrapbook 1947-1951; (CB-CAH).

Y&R had just announced Gulf Oil Corporation would be sponsoring a weekly newscast on WCBW-TV.[376]

A major concern about today's news media involves the influence of the advertisers. Since the U.S. media system is based on advertiser revenues, the companies that buy those commercials wield a considerable amount of power. By a simple change in their advertising budget, these companies can elevate or disintegrate the fortunes of a newspaper or television station. Advertisers are constantly using that influence not only for the best rate for their commercials, but to try and influence the programming in the media.

In his book *The Media Monopoly,* Ben Bagdikian argues that media are no longer neutral agents selling time, but instead are dependent on the corporations for the revenue and are also part of the corporate world through their ownership: "This raises the question whether our mass media are free to exercise their traditional roles of mediating among the forces of society at a time when they have become an integral part of one of those forces."[377] Once again, this argument is vital and appropriate in the 21st Century, but isn't very applicable to 1940s-era CBS television newscast.

Until the summer of 1946, the advertising influence wouldn't even apply since CBS didn't have any sponsors until that time. On a macro scale, one could argue that the television crew didn't have adequate personnel or equipment because of the lack of support from advertisers in this era, but that would be a separate issue.

During this era, the advertiser wasn't seen in such a negative, controlling light by all journalists. Radio and television networks and stations still made their money by selling program sponsorships, instead of individual commercials. An advertiser would

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[376]WCBW photograph from *Broadcasting,* 24 June 1946, 93.

[377]Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly,* 6th. ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 151.

buy a chunk of time, say 15 or 30 minutes, and would have various degrees of control over the program that ran in that time period. Some of NBC's first television news efforts had the mark of the company that paid for the time: *The Esso Television Reporter, Camel Newsreel Theatre,* and the *Camel News Caravan.*

The sponsorship system created somewhat of a class system of programming. The sponsored programs were considered more important because they brought in revenue to the media company, while the unsponsored efforts took on the demeaning moniker of "sustaining program." Sustaining programs mostly included the discussion and educational offerings that networks would hide in parts of the radio schedule when fewer people were listening. But the networks would trumpet these programs every year at license renewal time to convince the FCC that they were serious about public interest programming and weren't just out to make money.

For radio news, the sponsored newscast not only brought more prestige to the commentator responsible for that time slot, but oftentimes a fatter paycheck since he was getting paid by both his employer and the advertiser. Given this background, Cassirer said one reason television news wasn't taken very seriously at CBS in the early years was because it didn't have a sponsor. The newscast was costing the company money, but not bringing in any revenue. To be fair, none of the television programs on CBS during that period brought in any money.

In that environment, the photograph in *Broadcasting* magazine in June 1946 signaled an important moment for CBS-TV news. Not only did the sponsorship bring prestige to the news efforts, the newscast also had the distinction of being the first sponsored program on WCBW-TV. Instead of complaining about advertiser interference, the news staff welcomed the sponsor. Bob Bendick remembered it was a big moment because the company would start "getting some money back" on the news effort.

Cassirer saw the Gulf sponsorship as a "great success," while Burger considered Gulf's interest as a validation of their hard work. "It meant we were building an audience, we were getting people to watch us, and they (Gulf) wanted to reach that audience."

Bendick remembered the Gulf sponsorship as one of many steps as the television effort grew and started to attract attention. While the advertisers might have had influence over other programming, the news people don't remember much involvement by the sponsors or the advertising agencies in the newscast.

Cassirer's only memory of any kind of advertiser pressure came indirectly, from his boss Ed Chester, in 1948. Chester reminded the news crew that sponsor General Motors was also a defense contractor, so the news department should avoid criticism of the government. But Cassirer said he ignored the advice and never received any direct instructions on choosing stories or how those stories should be written.

Chet Burger worked with CBS-TV news until 1954 and he says he doesn't remember any kind of advertiser pressure. "It's interesting, because in all the years that I was there," remembered Burger, "I never even met a single person from any advertising agency (or) sponsor. We had absolutely no contact with them. We had a Chinese wall so high… They were absolutely totally remote from us."[378]

Of course, advertiser pressure can come in more subtle forms, but for the CBS-TV news department in the 1940s, there was little or no pressure to adapt or change their ideas on stories or presentation with the advent of commercial sponsorship.

On a Mission: Creating a New Template for News

The influences listed above, including management, audience, ratings, research, media routines and advertising, certainly couldn't be entirely ruled out during the 1940s CBS-TV newscasts. But they didn't guide the efforts and determine the content and

[378]Burger, Cassirer and Bendick quotes from interviews, (CB-OH2), (HC-OH), (RB-OH2).

format of the news. What makes this era so interesting is the *lack* of these usual influences. Instead of relying on the usual answers, the work must be studied from another angle, looking for another reason, other influences.

Using a very loose analogy, the 1940s CBS-TV newscasts are reminiscent of the goals of an experimental design in research. The problematic variables have been mostly eliminated, stripping the motivations and results clean of extenuating circumstances. What is left is the process of creating a new format for news. Also left is the question of why they did what they did. What prompted these people to work so hard at differentiating their news broadcast from other media? They didn't do it to please the bosses. They didn't do it to increase the ratings. They didn't do it because it had always been done that way. They didn't do it because of advertiser pressure.

Instead, a hint at the answer comes from the environment in which they worked; not the growing television industry, but instead the journalistic community. Getting a handle on what motivated the CBS-TV news people in the 1940s involves an understanding of the evolution of journalism itself during that period, with an emphasis on the dramatic changes in the print media.

CREATING THE TELEVISION NEWSCAST: PROFESSIONALISM AND MODERNISM

Comparing the work of the television news people in the 1940s to television journalism today, by stripping away all of the important influences, these people were working in a relative vacuum. Without praise or criticism from bosses or the audience, without a news routine, without an accepted set of practices, without a model of good and bad efforts, and without even a way to record and replay a newscast in the earliest days, an obvious question from a latter-day broadcast journalist became "When you tried something new, how did you know whether or not it worked?" This query was met with

blank stares and looks of people who had just been asked an obvious and unnecessary question. *They just knew*.

People with a limited journalistic background or maybe a few years, people with a variety of life experiences, and those who were fairly young, they all exuded a confidence that they knew what they were doing, or would soon find out. At the same time, they also conveyed a deep responsibility to the people watching the newscast, even in a time with few receivers. They had to not only present the proper mix of news, but they felt a strong obligation to prepare the information in a way that was best suited for audience understanding. Their duty didn't end with broadcasting the news, but just as importantly, their responsibility involved how the message was received by the viewer.

Journalism as a Profession

This mix of confidence and responsibility is partially the result of the moment in time when the format for television news was being negotiated and debated. In the larger journalistic community, the first half of the 20th Century had been a time of pushing for increased professionalism in journalism. At the same time, at least on the print side, the modernist era had filtered into the journalistic community, resulting in more form and order in both the stories and the format of the newspapers. The crew at CBS-TV news came of age when both of these forces were changing the role of journalism and the journalist.

Trust Us, We're Professionals

During the 1941 WCBW-TV newscasts, Bob Skedgell had sole control over selection and order of stories in the broadcast. He didn't rely on Paul White in CBS radio or Gilbert Seldes in CBS Television, or even his news announcer Richard Hubbell. "Well, I knew enough about journalism at that point," remembered Skedgell, "having

worked in the newsroom for a couple of years, that you make judgments on that. Any journalist does." When those newscasts began, Skedgell was 21 years old with fewer than two years of experience in any type of news setting. Granted, he did go out of his way to make sure an experienced radio news editor looked at his copy every day. But those editors never questioned or counseled him on story selection. Skedgell never took a class in journalism. Instead he learned at CBS, which he calls "the greatest college in the world for journalism." He puts his time learning from Elmer Davis, George Fielding Eliot and the others up against any journalism program: "best training in news anyone ever got, believe me."[379]

Most of the other early television news people felt the same way as Skedgell. The term "journalist" might be a little too high-brow for some, but "reporter" definitely fit their job description.[380] When asked what qualified them to be "reporters" or "journalists," the responses were as varied as their backgrounds. Cassirer said he became a journalist working with the CBS Shortwave Listening Station alongside the famous CBS radio news commentators in the newsroom. Bendick said he learned a "sense of newsworthiness" during World War II when he was shooting film during bombing missions. That experience helped him feel confident in his role with CBS-TV news in later years. Burger says his reporter stripes come from his years with CBS-TV news. Hewitt despises the term journalist, but his reporting skills came from his correspondent work during World War II as well as stints with a couple of newspapers, the Associated Press, and ACME News Pictures. Reuven Frank not only had a journalism degree from

[379]Skedgell quotes from interviews (RS-OH1/2).

[380]The newsroom was divided though between the "editorial" and the "technical" people. In general, the photographers and editors would not be considered journalists or reporters, no matter how much experience in news they might have.

Columbia University, but he also had a few years experience as a newspaper reporter and editor before joining NBC.

Basically, reporters or journalists can claim those titles by any criteria they choose. There are no barriers to entry or rules to follow. Any efforts to license journalists could be viewed as limiting the freedom of the press or the freedom of speech provisions in the Constitution.

Before the 1880s, the job of a reporter was a fairly mundane experience. Most reporters collected facts and information and got paid by the amount of space they were allowed to fill on the newspaper page. If the editor cut the story entirely, the reporter had done all that work for free. The reporter had little stature in the newsroom and mostly worked at the whim of the editor.

By the start of the 20th Century, reporters had gained importance, partly because of the increased use of bylines in articles and partly because of the success of some of the muckraking journalists such as Ida Tarbell and Lincoln Steffens. Journalists began to see their work more as a profession than just a vocation. In 1908, the University of Missouri started the first school of journalism. About that time, Joseph Pulitzer provided the funds so Columbia University in New York could start its own journalism school. Another way journalists attempted to elevate the importance of their work was through professional organizations. The American Society of Newspaper Editors started in 1922 and by the next year had endorsed a code of ethics for its members to follow.

Michael Schudson also believes that journalists pushed for professional status after World War I because of the emergence of public relations. In many cases, journalists were no longer able to go to the source for news, but instead were given handouts by the public relations staff hired by businesses and other organizations. Some journalists responded by becoming specialists in specific areas, while others elevated

their role to not only collecting the facts, but also putting them in context for the readers.[381]

Radio news started the move towards professional status with the formation of the Association of Radio News Editors and Writers in 1938. That was followed after the war with the National Association of Radio News Editors (NARNE) in 1946. NARNE was based on the newspaper editors' organization and boasted 100 members at the time of its formation. The group said its sole purpose was the betterment of radio news broadcasting: "The general aims are to further an exchange of ideas among radio news men, set standards for news gathering, editing and broadcasting."[382]

On the educational side, the number of schools offering classes in journalism kept increasing through the first half of the 20th Century. By 1939, 542 four-year schools in this country provided journalism instruction; including universities, teachers colleges, and Negro colleges. Of those schools, 32 were accredited by the American Association of Schools and Departments of Journalism while 71 others also offered degrees or majors in journalism.[383]

In this environment, when journalists in general, and radio journalists in particular were pushing the professionalism of their career, the confidence and sense of responsibility of the television crew is understandable and mirrors the rest of the industry. Plus, these people worked for CBS, which had been one of the most honored and celebrated radio news organizations in the world during the war. Working for one of the top American radio networks, and one that had been singled out for its news

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[381]Journalism professionalism from Schudson, *Discovering the News,* 61-159; and Wm. David Sloan and James D. Startt, *The Media In America: A History* (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 1999), 289-293.

[382]"National Assn. of Radio News Editors Formed With Hogan as Temporary Head," *Broadcasting,* 29 April 1946, 91.

[383]"Survey of Journalism Work Offered in 4-Year Institutions," *Journalism Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1941): 170-178.

professionalism, these people knew they were among a select group of reporters or journalists in the country.

More than Just Getting the News Out There

But these people weren't just concerned with their role as journalists in providing the most important information for the viewers. They were equally immersed in how that news should be presented. The visual dimension not only provided new opportunities, but also new concerns. They learned quickly that people tired of looking at the commentator on the air for a long stretch of time. While the listener could tune in his favorite news broadcaster night after night on radio, somehow the video element made that same broadcaster boring and repetitive on television, especially if he were merely reading from a script. The news crew struggled with various forms of visualization, from the readable war maps to the early attempts at creating animated graphics using Rudy Bretz's animator. Many stories included more than one form of visualization to try to make the information clearer and easier to understand..

Complicated Visualization Techniques

When contemplating the CBS-TV newscasts of the 1940s, descriptions such as "crude" or "primitive" should not be confused with simple. These newscasts were anything but easy to execute on the air. During this era, none of the visualization methods could be combined in advance. Today, a reporter's voice can be edited with the proper pictures, maps and graphics before the newscast, in one package, so all of the elements will fit together when played back during the live newscast.

But in the 1940s, with the exception of the edited film, everything had to happen live on the air. If the producer wanted to switch from a map to a film of an event, he had to make sure one camera was focused on the map, and that the film was threaded

correctly on the projector. Then, if the film rolled at the right moment, the director could switch from the camera to the film projector. Then, the announcer had to read his copy at just the right speed to make sure the words matched the specific scenes flashing on the screen from the film projector. At the same time, the camera would have to be repositioned for the next visual element, be it a shot of the commentator, a piece of artwork or an animated graphic. Each story had its own varying degree of visual complexity.

Truman Civil Rights: One Example

To understand how much work was involved in visualizing news stories in this era, the following is an example of an in-depth analysis piece. On February 7, 1947, the CBS-TV newscast included a story on a civil rights bill, supported by President Truman, and under debate in Congress. The story starts with Douglas Edwards on camera and included a graphic on the screen to denote the story topic. Next the viewer sees a photograph of the Statue of Liberty to symbolize the basic freedoms involved in a democracy. The picture then switches to newsfilm of Truman while the script discusses his civil rights proposal. Next, the director puts the camera on a map of the United States to visualize nationwide civil rights efforts. Over the map is then superimposed the words "Civil Rights" with some of the main points of the proposal.

Next, the director rolled film to go along with copy concerning the inequalities between whites and blacks in this country. That film includes shots of poor black families living in slums as well as black soldiers fighting in the war. The sound engineer is running music during the film to set the tone for the mood of the story.[384]

[384]Television borrowed from both radio and the newsreels for the practice of running music during stories. The music was supposed to set the tone for the story and make up for the lack of sound on the silent film. CBS finally put a stop to the use of music in news stories in the early 1960s.

The visualization continues with a machine that CBS used extensively in its newscasts. The Balopticon was an opaque projector which would switch back and forth between slides inserted in the machine. If the slides were built sequentially, the director could signify motion or change by switching from slide to slide in the balopticon. With this story, the special projector is used to show the main points of a job discrimination bill. Different percentages reveal on the screen to follow the words on the script.

Then, the director has to switch back to the film projector to play stock footage of lynchings in the south when discussing efforts to pass anti-lynching laws. The visual now changes to a graphic of President Truman followed in succession by pictures of Cox, Rankin, Eastland, Ellender, and Wright, congressmen involved in the issue. The camera next focuses on a photograph of the White House, followed by a shot of kids saluting a flag and back to the Statue of Liberty as the final paragraph of the script sums up the main points of the story.

All of those visual elements had to be executed live for one story in one newscast. And the commentator, Edwards, was only seen on camera for roughly ten seconds at the beginning of the story which ran approximately 4 minutes and 45 seconds.[385] This story is just one example of how much time and effort was directed at presenting a story that would include the proper visuals to promote understanding of the topic.

Emphasizing Both the Words and Pictures

Cassirer felt he had the responsibility of not only presenting the news but also making sure the visual side helped the viewer understand the story. In an article for the trade magazine *Televiser,* he warned his fellow video journalists not to lose sight of the dual mission of television news:

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[385]CBS News Script, 7 February 1947; Notes On TV News 2-3; (HC-CAH).

> The essential task of conveying the news information in a succinct, impressive way will always remain the principal objective. No mere visual approach to the news program will make it a valuable source of information. All participants in the program must be familiar with the news to be presented and must aim at the clarification and illustration of the latest press reports, rather than sacrifice the true and accurate drama of the news for the sake of arbitrary showmanship.[386]

Cassirer is urging television news people to be concerned with both the selection of stories in the newscast, but just as importantly, how the viewers will perceive and process that information. During that era, not many journalists thought both about the words and the impact of the visuals on how that story would be received. Plus, the combination of written information and visuals has proven to be problematic for researchers as well.

Barnhurst and Nerone say the disconnect is a result of the inclination to separate words and pictures, starting at an early age: "Schools train student to write in one class and make pictures in another. Newspapers clearly organize photographers to work apart from writers, despite efforts to encourage teamwork. Researchers do the same. The theories and methods at hand, as well as the scholarly societies and journals, reflect the industrial divide between word and image work."[387] For many of the radio and print news people of that era, merging the two just didn't seem right. Their frame of reference became the movies, which is why "show biz" comes up so often as a criticism of television news.

The CBS-TV news emphasis both on the news and how the stories were received by the viewer, demonstrated by the complicated visualization methods, fit into an overall trend in journalism studied by Barnhurst and Nerone. While the two authors in their

[386]Cassirer, "Telecasting the News.".
[387]Barnhurst and Nerone, 10.

book, *The Form of News,* concentrate solely on newspapers, their insights into the evolution of newspaper design and content help explain the early CBS-TV news efforts.

Constructing a Social Map: The Modernist Approach

Kevin Barnhurst and John Nerone noticed a drastic change in the look of newspaper front pages between the end of the 19th Century and the middle of the 20th Century. They label the late 1800s as the "Victorian Period" of newspapers. The Victorian paper was dense, filled with lots of copy, and contained as many as 50 items on the front page. Most of the headlines were short and of the same size, providing little direction on story importance. The authors describe the Victorian paper as a marketplace. The journalists let the readers come in and browse, yet it was up to the reader to decide what to emphasize and to digest. "Newspapers depicted a world not as subject to sense-making control of journalists, but instead as witness to endless variation and diversity."[388]

But in the first decades of the 20th Century, the modernist phase of art started to creep into American society. For newspapers, modernism started in advertising artwork and then spread to different parts of the paper. Under modernist design, order had to be made out of the chaos. The newspaper had to be easier to read and comprehend. From 1885 to 1945, the number of items on the front page dropped almost in half, from just under 50 to around 25. The size of the headline as well as the photographs and graphics led the reader to understand the importance of the story in relation to other news.

Barnhurst and Nerone call the modern newspaper a "social map" for the reader. "A map boils the complexity of the geographical world down to the minimum of line and labels needed for political and commercial tasks, such as traveling, shipping, setting boundaries and recording claims." The front page came to represent the modernist

[388]Ibid., 83.

attributes of simplicity and functionality. The social map design of the newspaper of that era also resulted from the journalists' push for professionalism. Instead of just being collectors of facts, the journalists were helping the reader understand the world through story placement, length of article, size of headline and number of accompanying photos and graphics. The journalists started to assume the role of setting the news agenda for the reader.

One of the major design changes during this period involved the number of illustrations and graphics on the front page. The charts, maps, and drawings took up less than 6 percent of the front page in 1885 and jumped to 21.5 percent by 1985. The heavier reliance on maps and graphics mirror Cassirer and Burger's desire to present war maps that would help the viewer understand the geography as well as the conflict.[389]

Using Barnhurst and Nerone's metaphor for that era in newspapers, the CBS-TV news team appeared to be interested in not just presenting the news, but creating a video "social map" for its viewers. The concentration on maps, artwork, film, animations and other graphics stemmed from their perceived role as the expert journalist making sense of the world and presenting it in an understandable form for their viewers. They didn't take on this task from an elitist perspective, but from an honest desire to present a functional news program, one that could be processed and understood by the viewer.

CREATING A TEMPLATE FOR TELEVISION NEWS

As a result of these efforts, the people at CBS-TV news in the 1940s didn't allow news on their network to closely mimic other media. Even with limited and primitive technology, the crew struggled with different methods for visualizing the stories; always

[389]Ibid., percentage of graphics, 201, "a map boils down…" 188.

considering how the information might be received by the viewer. Instead of just presenting the information in the most convenient format, be it newsfilm or just a script from a wire service, these news people attempted to create the social map for the viewers, helping them negotiate and understand the stories through various visualization methods.

The lack of an audience for and the limited archive material from these newscasts should not continue to punish these efforts in broadcast news histories through ignoring their existence or patronizing the work with scattered, random anecdotes. Instead this era in television news should be remembered for its important place at the critical moment when formats and presentation techniques for the medium were being negotiated.

CBS-TV news didn't emerge full-formed as a star vehicle for Douglas Edwards after the 1948 conventions. CBS TV news didn't merely transfer the audio news format from CBS radio and put it in front of the camera. CBS-TV news didn't just steal a newsreel format from the movie theaters and recreate it in the Grand Central Terminal studios. Other early television news efforts tried such direct media transfers, but not CBS. Instead, the CBS Television newscast evolved from those earliest 1941 pre-war broadcasts into a format that clearly borrowed from other news media, but in the process created a new format for journalism.

Chapter 10

Summary

> It is an imperfect instrument. Barely had men begun to master the uses of radio when the picture tube was added. One imperfection is that the picture overwhelms the word, and no one can take a picture of an idea.
>
> -Eric Sevareid, Commentator
> CBS Evening News
> November 28, 1977[390]

> At all times, it is the timeliness of the story that should determine its inclusion in the news program (just as in radio), rather than its pictorial aspects which is the deciding factor of a story's coverage by newsreel. Television's job then is to visualize the news by means of animated sketches and drawings, supplemented by still photos and film, thus covering all timely news stories.
>
> -Chester Burger, Visualizer
> CBS-TV News
> *Televiser* Magazine
> September 1946[391]

Even in his last week at CBS News in 1977, Eric Sevareid was still suspicious of the visual side of news. Sevareid had made his mark through the written word; sent through the airwaves via his own voice. To the end, television got in the way of the ideas he felt news should include.

But more than 30 years earlier, when Sevareid was basking in the post-war glory of his World War II radio reporting achievements as one of the "Murrow Boys," other CBS newsmen had already taken on the challenge of visualizing the news. But the work

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[390]Text of Sevareid commentary from Julius Hunter and Lynne Gross, *Broadcast News: The Inside Out* (St. Louis: C.V. Mosby Co., 1980) 4-5.

[391]Burger, "Visualizing the News."

of Chet Burger, Henry Cassirer, Bob Bendick, and the other CBS television news pioneers has been mostly ignored, or at best, trivialized.

RANDOM ANECDOTES

This project started with two bits of information from different sources involving the 1948 political conventions. First, three out of four political parties chose Philadelphia as their convention site because of the new eastern seaboard television network. Next, the image of CBS President Frank Stanton practically on his knees begging Murrow and Sevareid to help out on the television coverage at the conventions.

Within each source, the individual information fit. In the context of a presidential campaign, politicians recognized the potential audience by holding their conventions along the new television network. In the world of the Murrow Boys, radio was the serious medium and television didn't matter during the 1940s.

But putting those two incidents together forced an important question. How could a medium be so important that the political parties made a critical decision based on its potential power, while two of the most famous and respected broadcast journalists felt it beneath them to participate in the new format? That question sparked others which eventually led to the realization that the birth and development of television news had been mostly forgotten and unexplored.

Random anecdotes survived to whet the appetite. Images of Rudy Bretz's American flag blowing in a man-made breeze during FDR's Pearl Harbor speech, Bob Skedgell's short stay as television news' first writer, and even Douglas Edwards' move from radio to the new medium. But those incidents mostly are employed to point out the crude technology or the obscurity of the efforts.

The omission of this important time in television and journalism history is understandable considering the most popular frames for telling television or broadcast

news history. Television history tends to focus on the inventors and the larger than life people: Sarnoff, Paley, Farnsworth, Zworykin, and Du Mont. In this frame, RCA and NBC are the overwhelming leaders in the development of television. But that strand can't easily lead to the birth of television news since NBC farmed out most of its television news efforts until 1949's *Camel News Caravan*.

On the other hand, broadcast news histories lean towards the importance of World War II in the development and importance of radio news. In this context, Murrow and his boys tend to get the most attention. Since those broadcasters shunned and denigrated early television news, the easiest path is to ignore years of work and development at CBS television and allow the newscast to appear fully-formed in the 1950s.

INCLUDING OTHER VOICES

Edward R. Murrow didn't invent television news. *See It Now* wasn't the first instance of journalism on the visual medium. Neither statement takes away from the important place Murrow and *See It Now* have in journalism, broadcasting, and political history. But this project unearths a clear lineage of efforts to present news on television at CBS back to the pre-war experimental broadcasts.

Through the first half of the 20th Century, the most popular method of historical research involved focusing on the political, military or business leaders of the moment in question. This emphasis on "dead white guy" history started to give way to a social history movement in the 1960s. Researchers started to bring out the stories and experiences of everyday people during specific historical periods.

In a small way, this project follows the social history approach by pulling in other voices and experiences. The accomplishments and viewpoints of Murrow, Paley, Sarnoff and other broadcast leaders have filled several volumes over the years. But a better

understanding of that era emerges when the work and experiences of people like Bendick, Cassirer, Burger, Racies, Skedgell and others are added to the record.

Oral History Interviews

The natural inclination involving the study of early television news would be to study the content of the newscasts. But the technological constraints on recording television programs during this era forced the project into other directions. The limited material on the content end resulted in a richer experience with the emphasis on individual experiences, through oral history interviews and personal archives research.

Since this era has been virtually ignored and little content exists, the experiences of the people involved become critical to understanding the development of a format for news on television. Plus, since the early CBS television newscasts have received such little attention, each of these people represented voices that had been given precious little space in the historical record.

In addition, some of the same people involved in these efforts saved detailed archives of the era. So the remembrances of events more than a half-century in the past could be checked against extensive collections of company documents, internal memos, newspaper and magazine clippings as well as private correspondence. Plus, the resources of the National Archive FCC files, the CBS Reference Library, as well as numerous newspapers, magazine and trade publications helped confirm or refute information gleaned from the interviews.

For example, at first, one might be a bit skeptical of Cassirer, Burger and others relating the diligence and work that went into coming up with a new format for news on television when those efforts are mostly ignored in broadcast histories. Maybe the years had colored their views and caused them to glorify their contributions. But when research in trade publications in the era consistently single out the CBS newscasts for

praise while offering tougher critiques for other efforts, as well as awards from early television interest groups, one gradually is led to believe these people were involved in something demanding further study. Plus, when *Billboard* compared the headline-grabbing, expensive *Camel Newsreel Theatre* against the more modest CBS-TV news which didn't even have newsreel service at the time, and clearly recognized the accomplishments of CBS over NBC, the information from the oral history interviews takes on added importance.

The oral history interview approach also resulted in a more textured, well-rounded view of the early television news efforts. This type of historical research allows for a multiplicity of voices to provide deeper context of the events. Instead of allowing Murrow and radio broadcasters to define the television efforts, the very people working on those newscasts are included. Plus, the interviews weren't limited to just the people with traditional print or radio jobs of writing, announcer or overseeing the process. Henry Cassirer and Chet Burger provided their insights from writing and editing the newscasts. But Larry Racies also added perspective as a photographer with a newsreel background. Bob Bendick worked not just as a manager of the television efforts, but as a former print and film photographer. Richard C. Hottelet, as well as Joe and Shirley Wershba added the view from the radio side of CBS during early television development. Reuven Frank brought in insight from a former print reporter and editor and early rival at NBC News. Don Hewitt is mostly known for his work on *60 Minutes*. But he also played a significant role in the development of television news at CBS.

Taken together, these oral history interviews combined with other historical methods should alter the accepted historical record on the birth and development of television news.

TELEVISION'S BACK STORY

This section started as a brief overview of both television and broadcast news history to provide context for the birth of television news. But the back story became an important element in understanding how the CBS video efforts evolved as compared with NBC and other television pioneers.

NBC and RCA dominate most histories of early television because of their leadership role in inventing, manufacturing, and promoting television. Sarnoff's public relations triumphs including the 1939 World's Fair, the 1946 Louis-Conn fight as well as his successful efforts to beat back CBS color television allows for a perception that NBC must have been leading the way in all parts of television, including news. The early efforts of live coverage, including the World's Fair, the 1940 political convention, and other pre-arranged newsworthy events tend to reinforce the idea of NBC's lead in public affairs and news coverage on television.

But on closer inspection, NBC might have had the more extensive resources, the better equipment, and the deeper experience in television than CBS and other early stations, but the company didn't marshal those resources into a true NBC regular television news effort until 1949's *Camel News Caravan*. Instead, the events that generated publicity, such as the World's Fair or the 1940 conventions, tended to be special events designed to showcase the latest technology instead of a consistent approach to news programming.

On the other hand, CBS's early years of television can be easily dismissed as inferior to the work at RCA, Philco, and General Electric. The 1931-1933 experimental station might have garnered Paley some public relations points, but the mechanical system was already doomed before W2XAB ever signed on the air. During the rest of the 1930s and early 1940s, while RCA, Farnsworth, and others were inventing and

perfecting electronic television, CBS could only offer Peter Goldmark and a mechanical color system. Since Paley is often portrayed, with some merit, as attempting to delay television to hold off Sarnoff and RCA, the CBS pre-war television efforts receive little attention.

But by viewing television at a different angle from the inventors and engineers at the other companies, CBS came up with a fresh approach to the new medium. Just the idea that the network would hire a television novice, Gilbert Seldes, merely because of his insightful article on experimental television, signaled CBS would be heading in a different direction. Then Seldes also ignored television veterans and brought in a Broadway producer, Worthington Miner, to help him create programming and techniques for the news medium.

Miner, and, to a lesser extent, Seldes have been remembered in television history for their part in creating the golden age of the live television drama. But they also influenced the beginning of television news through some of their early employees who handled not only the entertainment programming, but everything else on the pre-war schedule, including the newscast. Robert Bendick spent countless hours with Seldes and the early CBS television personnel learning how to shoot film and frame live cameras for the "postage stamp art." The time spent critiquing film techniques, shot selection, and lighting during the pre-war experimental broadcasts sounds very similar to the visualization debates during news meetings a few years later.

CBS 1941 NEWSCASTS

The pre-war CBS-TV newscasts deserve more attention, if only for the amount of time devoted to news each day during the period before and after Pearl Harbor. Two 15-

minute commercial-free newscasts a day signifies more time devoted to daily news on CBS in the late afternoon early evening hours than can be found on the network today.

These newscasts, which were doomed into extinction by the reallocation of resources for war production, appear at first to be an oasis, a footnote, before the real beginning of CBS television news a few years later. First of all, Robert Skedgell may have a place in history for being the first person working full-time as a television news writer. But Skedgell never really embraced the new medium. He wrote his newscast in much the same way as he would have over at CBS radio news. In fact, after a month or so, he started spending most of his days back over at CBS radio, so he could rely on the experienced editors and wider resources not available at the Grand Central Terminal studios.

Skedgell said he did adapt his writing style to allow for the new medium and knew much of the newscast would involve the use of war maps to enhance the copy. But for the most part, he let the other television personnel deal with the visualization issues. He concentrated on getting the latest information from the wire services and editing the stories into a newscast not unlike would be presented on CBS radio.

Plus, the announcer on the 1941 newscasts, Richard Hubbell, didn't continue in television news after his brief time on the CBS broadcasts. He came in as one of Seldes' original television people and left CBS when the studio shut down during World War II. He continued to work on the development of television during the 1940s, but he didn't return to news broadcasting.

In addition, these newscasts were fairly primitive, even by pre-war standards. Skedgell doesn't remember using film during the broadcasts. They were mostly confined to detailed war maps and the latest news from the wire services.

But these newscasts are clearly linked to the next version of CBS-TV news which launched in May 1944. While Skedgell and Hubbell may not have returned, some of the original television crew did take part in both efforts. Rudy Bretz worked on the 1941 newscasts and then became one of the early key people in pushing the visual possibilities of television news later in the decade with his animated graphics and his Bretzicon invention which allowed for a live animated look at battle movements. Plus, Robert Bendick graduated from running camera on the original newscasts to running the entire news operation after returning from the war.

While the daily newscasts might not have involved many complicated visual elements, the attack on Pearl Harbor signified an important moment for CBS Television news. Not only did the event provide the station with an early experience in handling a major worldwide story, the implications of the attack forced the television crew to seriously think about the role of the visual medium. Instead of racing on the air at the first possible moment on that Sunday, the crew instead chose to build an entirely new set to reflect the world-wide conflict which would face the nation for the next few years. Plus, on that day, they had to come up with new ways to present instantaneous information, without the luxury of rehearsals or even scripts.

By presenting so many newscasts during 1941 and 1942, the CBS television crew gained invaluable experience which would help expand the horizons of the next installment of news on WCBW-TV.

VISUALIZING THE NEWS

> It will not be true television unless it uses most of the facilities available at the television station, adapting each one to the best way of reporting the individual story. (Film, for instance, is best to report a parade, graphic work is more adequate to visualize a tax debate in Congress, and remote cameras are most

> effective to convey the colorful scene of a convention. Maps can tell battle movements better than words, but late reports from an overseas conference are most suitably and speedily summarized by the commentator himself, speaking to his audience "on camera.)
>
> -Henry Cassirer
> *Journalism Quarterly*[392]

Cassirer's writings from the 1940s contradicted the accepted descriptions of early television news as mindless, a glorified newsreel, or Alexander Kendricks' "on-camera reading of brief press bulletins, between a vocal solo and a soft shoe." Something more was going on above that train station in mid-town Manhattan.

Radio Distance

The CBS radio newscasters' dismissal of television in the 1940s helped lead to the ignorance of the work to this day, but at the time, the anti-television attitude created opportunities for people who never would have had a chance for jobs against the more experienced broadcasters. One can only speculate how television news would have developed if Murrow and his followers had jumped over to television immediately after returning from World War II. Maybe the purse strings would have been forced open for the development of world-wide film network ten years earlier. Maybe the television reporter would have emerged as an important element in the newscast much sooner. Or maybe the distrust that many of these people had for the visual side of news would have clouded their own efforts to create a new format for news. Maybe they would have settled for simply recreating a radio newscast on television.

But the established radio newscasters ignored the opportunity to create television news, leaving the work to a group of relatively unknown (then, and to this day) group of people from a variety of backgrounds.

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[392]Henry R. Cassirer, "Television News: A Challenge to Imaginative Journalists," *Journalism Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (September 1949): 277-280.

Team Effort

The lack of a clear leader in the early years of CBS Television news allowed for a more fluid working arrangement and the chance of more experimentation. CBS-TV didn't have a Murrow to dictate the right and wrong way to present news on television. Therefore, the individual members were free to voice their opinions and try their ideas with less of a chance of being second-guessed or overruled.

In this environment, the diverse backgrounds and life experiences of the news people helped generate a variety of new ideas and approaches to news. Cassirer brought his knowledge of the world and the importance of geography and maps to the effort. Burger brought his experiences in explaining the war to army recruits and later used his knowledge of New York City to guide the early efforts at visual reporting in the city with film cameras. Hurwitz and Bendick used their film backgrounds to push that side of the visualization process. Racies brought his newsreel and breaking news experience to the process, convincing the crew to utilize the film cameras in the early years. Bretz used his experience with the early Seldes television group to find ways to bring printed wire copy to life on the visual screen through animations. Georg Olden used his artistic background to create a television format for stories that would otherwise be deemed non-visual. Later, Don Hewitt brought his print news background and a love for theatrics and competition.

Plus, these people all came together in a unique time in history. Because various circumstances had pushed the development of commercial television into the later years of the war, CBS television news benefited from a workforce much more mature and savvy because of their experiences during World War II. Even though the famous radio news didn't want to get involved, CBS-TV news didn't have to settle for people with little work or life experience.

That era also allowed CBS-TV news to develop a format and approach to content at the very moment the rest of the journalistic community was forced to reassess its mission. Radio, newspapers, and magazines had focused on war news for so many years, the post-war period caused journalists in all media to find different answers to the question, "what is news?" Television, along with other media, evolved the content away from war information to more national, state, and local coverage.

Influence from Other Media

Television news in the 1940s has also been trivialized by accusations of full-scale adoption of another medium's format for the visual screen. Descriptions of news efforts as radio on television or as a televised newsreel have been used to demonstrate the lack of evidence of the medium creating its own format for news. These criticisms work in individual cases, but not as an indictment of the medium as a whole. NBC did put a television camera in Lowell Thomas' radio studio for 1941 television newscasts. Plus, *Telenews* and other companies did provide pre-packaged newsreels which were quite popular with stations during the late 1940s and 1950s. But CBS-TV news didn't take either of those approaches when developing its news format.

Of course, CBS was influenced by news from more established media. Both Skedgell and Cassirer brought over the processes and approaches to news coverage from CBS radio news, where they had both received their first training in journalism. Cassirer's analysis piece on CBS-TV came straight from the work of the famous CBS radio news reporters to put the news in context for the listener. Both CBS radio and television relied heavily on the wire services for news information.

The impact of the newsreels is obvious. While CBS never developed its own network of film photographers during the 1940s, the crew did rely more and more on film in its newscasts as the years progressed, starting with modest efforts in New York,

followed by the contract with *Telenews* for pictures from across the country and around the world.

Creating a New Template for News

But the crew at CBS chose not to mimic any other media, and instead set out to develop its own format for television. The approach appears deceptively simple after more than 60 years of television news building on the formula, but at the time the format had evolved from years of trial and error. Instead of relying on one main visualization tool, the CBS crew attempted to find the best method for visualizing each story. They didn't want to avoid important stories that might be hard to show on television and at the same time they didn't want to fall into the trap of newsreels showing events only for their pictorial value.

Henry Cassirer made a critical decision when he fought for a staff artist before asking for a film photographer. At the time, a staff artist could be of more immediate help on World War II stories than a film photographer in New York. Since the CBS news people didn't have an unlimited budget and access to the latest newsreel footage, they were forced to create their own visualization techniques. They turned to still photos, drawings, geographic maps, war symbols, animated graphics, and animated maps since news film was so rare in the early years.

Just the idea that CBS hired Chet Burger as a "visualizer" showed the news staff wasn't going to let the availability of film totally drive content decisions. Instead, Burger and the others had to find a way to tell the political stories, the economic stories, and the far-off international stories through the resources at hand. Just as the 1941 WCBW television crew had to create interest in indoor sports such as badminton and table tennis since it didn't have a mobile unit to send to baseball games and horse races, the CBS-TV

news crew had to learn ways to present an international newscast with just the limited resources available at the Grand Central Terminal.

As newsfilm became more readily available, the CBS crew may have missed out on the development of a newsfilm network partly because it had been so successful using its other visualization techniques. More than likely the network wouldn't have financed such an operation anyway. The *Billboard* review in February 1948 is a testament to the visualization efforts when the writer had high praise for the CBS effort while dismissing the $10,000-a-week *Camel Newsreel Theatre* effort on NBC, which had the full resources of 20th Century Fox Movietone News at its disposal.

The limitations of the early television newscasts are apparent. CBS didn't invest in a stable of television news reporters and photographers. CBS didn't merge the radio and television news efforts and put the famous radio correspondents to work on the visual side. Therefore, early television news involved little original reporting. Instead of having its own reporters out digging up stories, CBS had to rely on the wire services for much of the information. Chet Burger and Douglas Edwards did go out with CBS photographers in the early years, but those instances were in addition to their normal duties back at the studio.

But given those limitations, the crew at CBS-TV news in the 1940s made the most of their resources and created a template for television news presentation which is closely mirrored to this day.

BEFORE THE TELEVISION NEWS ANCHOR

A study of the 1940s CBS-TV news efforts quickly dismisses the common perception that television news in this country has always been built for and revolved

around the news anchor. That explanation might work if the birth of television news is pushed to 1949 when John Cameron Swayze settled in at NBC to compete against Douglas Edwards over at CBS. But the efforts that led to Edwards' prominent role at CBS tell a different story about the role of the news commentator.

In the early years of CBS-TV news, the commentator was just one element of the newscast. In 1941, Paul White didn't even provide an announcer for the television newscasts. Instead, CBS pulled Richard Hubbell from the TV programming department and put him on the air as the face of CBS-TV news. Hubbell disappeared when the studio went dark during World War II.

After the relaunch of CBS-TV news in 1944, White this time allowed radio announcers (Ned Calmer, Everett Holles, and Allan Jackson) to work on television. But this decision apparently was made because the twice-weekly newscast didn't need a full-time announcer and the television work meant extra money for the radio newscasters. Their work didn't signal a closer working relationship between radio and television or an effort to establish a radio newscaster as the face of CBS-TV news.

Plus, Henry Cassirer admitted he wasn't sure what role an announcer should play in television news. In his attempt at avoiding the criticism of only presenting a radio newscast on television, at first he tried to hide the announcer behind some type of visuals on every story. But he didn't have enough resources during that time to visualize all stories; plus, a faceless voice behind pictures would invite comparisons to theater newsreels, another format Cassirer did not want to mimic.

CBS-TV news didn't build its newscast around an individual. Instead, the newscaster fit into the format designed around the importance of visualizing each story, depending on the content. Still, the crew began to experiment with the role of the commentator by trying out several different men in the early years. From Hubbell to

Edwards, at least a dozen people announced the news on CBS-TV. They tried radio announcers, print reporters, sports writers, men with beards, and men with various other backgrounds and appearances.

The CBS-TV crew eventually decided the key to a successful newscaster would be his personality. The person would be perceived by the viewers as a guest in their home, so he should appear calm, measured, personable and knowledgeable. With that idea in mind, Douglas Edwards became a natural for the role of commentator on CBS-TV news.

It's interesting to note that a common criticism of television news by the print media to this day is the importance of the person reading the news. The underlying theme is that television is shallow because it emphasizes the pretty or famous face over the content of the news. But that obsession with visual acceptability of an announcer or entertainer started in the print media, well before television even had a chance to reach a wide audience. As far back as 1932, Orrin Dunlap of the *New York Times* warned that people who couldn't please the eye "would have to watch out." In the early years of television, newspapers and trade magazines reviewed television programs, including news, as they would a Broadway play or the latest movie from Hollywood. Therefore, the person reading the news would be put under the same scrutiny as an actor on stage. The content of the newscast wouldn't always merit such close inspection.

THE 1948 POLITICAL CONVENTIONS

Even amongst those writers who mostly ignore early television news, the 1948 political conventions are usually given special attention. The obvious reasons include the potential audience available because of the new commercial coaxial cable along the eastern seaboard and the convergence of the most important politicians in one city to

nominate a Presidential candidate in front of the "all-encompassing eye" of television. The 1948 conventions are significant for the above reasons as well as signaling the most extensive television coverage of a political event up until that time.

But another reason those summer events get so much attention is because they forced the first up-close look at the new competition for many print and radio reporters. CBS radio newscasters, who had been able to mostly avoid the visual medium up to that point, were suddenly surrounded by cameras, lights, and fellow employees who believed in their medium just as much as the radio people did in theirs. Plus, several of the radio newscasters had to actually participate in the television coverage.

To add to the publicity, in an early act of convergence, a few different print media outlets worked with television networks on the convention coverage. *Life* reporters appeared on air alongside NBC newscasters while *Newsweek* journalists learned about television through their arrangement with the Du Mont network. Those affiliations brought even more journalists into direct contact with television, resulting in more coverage of the new medium at the conventions.

1948 TELEVISION NEWS: NOT A BEGINNING, BUT A CONTINUING EVOLUTION

The 1948 political convention coverage didn't cause CBS to suddenly discover television news. The network didn't start a daily newscast and put Edwards into the commentator's chair because of his work in Philadelphia that summer. Instead, Edwards had been working on the television newscast for more than a year and a half before the conventions. The television crew had already decided Edwards was the best person for the job well before the conventions. Plus, the newscast had been expanded to five nights a week back in May, a month before the Republican convention. What did happen after

the conventions is that CBS formally moved Edwards from radio to television and named him as the permanent newscaster on CBS-TV News.

Contrary to other historical accounts, the newscast was not built around Edwards. He had eased into the role of television news announcer in 1947, during a period when several people were being evaluated for their skills in the video format. The announcer was treated as another visual element in the newscast. That didn't change after the conventions. Henry Cassirer was still the news editor, Chet Burger was still writing, reporting, and visualizing the news. Fred Rickey, with more and more help from Don Hewitt, was still directing the newscasts. Bob Bendick still handled the special events coverage and had a hand in the daily news product.

The newscast would experience a change in leadership in 1949 after Cassirer's dismissal and the emergence of Hewitt as both an editorial and technical leader in the news department. But these personnel shifts didn't represent the birth of television news or even a new era; but instead, a continuation in the evolution of television news that can be traced back to the experimental newscasts before Pearl Harbor on WCBW-TV.

The people who worked on CBS-TV news from 1941 to 1948 could have taken the easy route and merely adopted another media format for the visual screen. They weren't being pushed by the management at CBS to create something new and they certainly weren't gaining any respect from their radio news brethren for their efforts. Instead, they struggled with a new format for television because of their belief in the important role of the journalist to not only provide the latest news, but to present it in such a way as to make it understandable for the viewer. Plus, many of them truly believed in the future power of television and the important role news would play on the medium, if only the journalists would understand and utilize the unique characteristics of the new medium.

The television news pioneers at CBS in the 1940s are responsible for the look and format of television news that we watch to this day. They struggled with the role of the commentator and came up with the modern-day approach of having a newscaster "anchor" the program by reading many of the stories and introducing the rest. Instead of the dramatic vocal work of some radio newscasters or the monotone of a reporter merely reading a script on camera, the CBS-TV crew settled on the idea of the newscaster as a guest in the viewers' living room, presenting the news in an authoritative, yet conversational manner.

Just as important, they laid the foundation for today's television newscast, including ideas of pacing and visualization. The CBS-TV news people tried to consider each story on its news value, not on the availability of film. But they also wouldn't settle for long stretches of the commentator reading a script on camera. As a result, visualization techniques such as maps, animated graphics, artwork, cartoons, drawings, and other methods became integral parts of the newscasts. Since each story was considered as an individual element, the newscast became a collection of individual stories, each employing a different collection of visualization elements. As a whole, the various methods of visualizing the stories created a pace designed to hold the viewer's attention and make the story more understandable.

By taking this approach, the CBS-TV newscast borrowed ideas from other news media, but didn't mimic other news sources such as the theater newsreel, radio newscast, or newspaper.

NBC gravitated to the CBS model of television news by 1949 when the *Camel News Theatre* became the *Camel News Caravan*. John Cameron Swayze moved out in front of the camera and introduced news stories both with and without film, similar to

Douglas Edwards' role on CBS. Other stations eventually discarded the newsreel or radio format and followed the lead of CBS television news.

As a result of their work in the 1940s, the people of CBS-TV news created a new template for news, a new format for information, by paying special attention to the unique strengths and deficiencies of television. Their arguments, experiments, mistakes, and breakthroughs resulted in the basic format of television news we watch to this day. For those efforts, the people of CBS-TV news in the 1940s are truly television news' first visualizers.

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Vita

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